

REVISING THE ESSAY: INTELLECTUAL ARENAS AND HYBRID FORMS

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2008

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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This dissertation charts the theoretical, pedagogical, and rhetorical possibilities of the essay in order to argue for essay writing as a central intellectual pursuit within the university. Although the term "essay" has often functioned as a placeholder for many types of writing and has been used to promote narrow, sometimes formulaic, writing, I articulate the ways that the essay illustrates thinking on the page and fosters genuine intellectual activity. This study thereby enriches theoretical scholarship on the essay, offers pedagogies that support critical essay-writing, and contends that we imagine both students and scholars as connected through the shared "intellectual arena" the essay creates. I coin the term "essayistic impetus" – an epistemological drive toward critical and reflexive knowledge via thinking in and through writing – to define the essay's guiding principle. The theory of the essay I construct spans several types of materials, all of which have been under-theorized within scholarship on the essay in composition studies: theories of essayistic prose authored by Theodor Adorno and M.M. Bakhtin; new critical textbooks by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren; the hybrid prose essays of Joan Didion and Gloria Anzaldúa; the photographic essay *After the Last Sky* co-authored by Edward Said and Jean Mohr; and, finally, essay films by Chris Marker and Wong Kar-wai. The later chapters of the dissertation focus specifically on hybrid essays – essays which draw on multiple genres and discourses, formal structures, and media. I argue that hybrid essays offer a particularly fruitful understanding of the essay, its goals, and its intellectual possibilities. Since hybrid essays present a range of rhetorical strategies and styles of writing, they can assist students in strengthening their repertoires as both readers and writers capable of

sustaining complex, dialogic, reflexive inquiries and projects. Reading and writing hybrid essays, I contend, aids students in developing greater generic, stylistic, and rhetorical awareness, strategies which they can then effectively deploy for their own diverse purposes. Finally, I argue that hybrid essays can serve as a productive heuristic for better confronting and understanding the literacy demands that complex, emerging new media forms demand.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project such as this one contains many voices and influences and thanks are due to those who were gracious enough to become part of the ongoing conversation I hope that this dissertation suggests. I'd like to thank my committee chair, David Bartholomae, whose ability to see the larger contours of this project was more helpful than I could have imagined. Two other members of the committee, Mariolina Salvatori and Nancy Glazener, deeply influenced my scholarship early on and remained among my most useful and committed readers throughout this long process. Likewise, Don Bialostosky and Jacqueline Royster, as well as James Slevin, provided thoughtful and provocative questions that helped me refine my arguments and rediscover my own commitments to the diverse uses of hybrid essays for student reading and writing. Jennifer Trainor, Kathryn Flannery, Jessica Enoch, and Terry Smith provided help throughout the stages of my career at Pitt and I am grateful to each of them.

I must also thank the broader community at The University of Pittsburgh and the interdisciplinary English department which encouraged the intellectual engagement and the cross-disciplinary work I advocate for here. I feel fortunate to have been able to combine my interests in writing, literacy, and pedagogy with my interests in non-fiction prose, style, cinema, and new media – a feat which in many departments would not have been possible. My colleagues across these disciplines – Brenda Glascott, Amy Borden, Kyle Stevens, Amanda Klein, Chris Warnick, Kate Dube, and Seth Boyd – brought their intellect, patience, and sense of humor to this project and I thank them for it. In a similar vein, I must thank the students I have had the privilege to teach over the past eight years both at Pitt and at the Advanced Studies Program at St. Paul's School in New Hampshire. All of these students have helped me to grow as both a teacher and a writer; in many ways, they have made this work possible.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my family for their continued support and encouragement. To my mother who took it upon herself to ensure that both of her daughters could pursue

an advanced education, to my sister who models the generous and rigorous roles of a public intellectual through her work with the NIH, and to my partner, Erin Deasy, whose love and repeated mantra of “smart thoughts” helped me to keep working, I dedicate this dissertation especially to each of you.

PREFACE

This is a dissertation about literacy and one particular form that literacy takes – the essay. Written from primary school through graduate school, written over the course of five or more centuries, the essay is the literary form where a writer’s thinking is most visible “on the page.” Descriptions of the essay’s ability to both generate and portray thinking abound: the essay encourages a writer to work through a problem or “mental knot,” the essay allows the mind to wander and connect disparate ideas, the essay shows a “free mind at play.”¹ Each of these descriptions position the essay as a place for significant – if exploratory – intellectual work. Each description imagines the writer as a thinker in the process of coming to ideas, testing their merit and their contingencies, engaging different ways of looking at an issue or topic, different ways of looking at the world and a writer’s place within it.

I came to this project as a writer – a poet and, I suppose, an essayist – who was attracted by the structure certain forms of writing allowed while simultaneously skeptical of how such structures, such restraints, might be generative. Like many writers, I initially had to be assigned such forms as sonnets, villanelles, reflexive writing, and sectional narratives in order to push beyond the forms with which I was comfortable, the writing in which I had been schooled and through which I had succeeded and been rewarded. What necessarily accompanied these encounters with new forms of writing was a shift in how I perceived the ideas in my writing. Outside my comfort zone, adrift in an unfamiliar way of saying something, I found that maybe writing wasn’t always used to communicate an already thought-through idea. Maybe the writing brought me *to* an idea, a connection, a way of seeing something I had at first overlooked. And maybe this allowed me to say something I hadn’t originally anticipated.

¹ For some of the best language describing the essay’s relationship to thinking in writing, see Philip Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay*.

It is worth mentioning the two particular projects which, unbeknownst to me at the time, got me thinking about the many ways that writing could help me to both generate and represent thought. A first crucial project occurred when I worked with a photographer to document the lives of two artists living in rural Maine. My partner and I began the project interested in our subject, Tom's vineyard; we conducted interviews, went on tours of the cellars, learned about the processes of wine-making, and set out to depict what making wine in rural Maine was all about. But something else showed up on the tapes and the transcripts. As we moved from the wine cellars inside the house, we met Tom's wife, Gail – a weaver. As we shared meals with them, as we learned to be quieter and less directive with our questions, we learned what it was like for these two artists to try to subsist on earnings from artistic production and what it was like to reside within their world. Slowly, the project began to shift. Initially, we didn't even realize it.

As the writer in this project, my relationship to the photographs of Tom and Gail created a dynamic synergy which partially motivated a change in direction. Through the images I saw them in a different way, a way that I often couldn't directly convey in prose. I saw many things that I had overlooked or marginalized as negligible; I saw, sometimes, what our project might really "be about" if it were to be as meaningful as we could make it. This is not to say that I wanted to write what I saw in the pictures; I didn't want to translate or spell out what I saw there, a move that I speculated would reduce both my words and my partner Rachel's images. Instead, viewing the photographs allowed me to return to my writing and revise it with fresh eyes, adding layers of complication and resonance that then interacted with the images in more suggestive ways. The visual put pressure on my thinking about the project – what it could say, what it could do, and ultimately, what it meant.

But as powerful as my interaction with the photographs was (and as the collaboration with Rachel, my photographer-partner, was) my relationship to the form of the essay I was working to write also significantly impacted the directions of the final piece. I had never written a lengthy non-fiction essay before, and I struggled with issues of distance and intimacy, description and suggestion, reflection and interpretation of lives that were other than my own. I was learning both a new set of precise

rhetorical and generic strategies for relaying what I saw and what I thought; such strategies prompted me not only to notice different types of things but to think differently about what I noticed. Writing in a new, unfamiliar form – although a struggle – proved to be a watershed moment for me in approaching what it was I both wanted and needed to say.

A similar moment came during my graduate coursework when I embarked on the construction of a collaborative video-essay that reflected on cultural difference and representation. Working with a fellow graduate student, we constructed a 15 minute film accompanied by a ten page paper – each of which, as its primary methodology, used fragments and juxtaposition to draw ideas, images, provocations, and our reflections together. The construction of both compositions was arduous; the thread we tried to weave throughout the pieces veered off often and erratically and we would find ourselves addressing or exploring an aspect of the project we hadn't anticipated. It was a learning process which ranged across theoretical and artistic texts, across words and images – a process in which each piece was carefully selected, edited, and stitched to the next to create a whole.

This project, like the writing project in Maine, put pressure on the forms of writing and scholarly communication I had known up until that point. More than serving as a respite from the traditional seminar paper, this project forced me to consider how the shape of the video-essay allowed me to explore, think, and compose differently. In a class grounded in the negotiation and theorization of difference, the form the project took was necessarily apt, doing much of the “teaching” of the course objectives as we struggled to produce work and think outside familiar generic boundaries. As my education continued, I looked for these border crossings in the scholarship of my now-chosen field: Composition. Although the models were not always as plentiful as I might have liked, I was inspired by those figures within composition who wrote about essays and who wrote essayistically. Jacqueline Royster in *Traces of a Stream*, James Slevin in *Introducing English*, Nancy Sommers in “Between the Drafts,” and Richard Miller in “The Nervous System” were early influences that demonstrated to me not only the merits of essayistic thought, but that such essayistic writing could exist within our academic field.

My contention in this dissertation is that in its various forms and incarnations, the essay – one of the forms of writing we already ask our students to produce – is the form best suited to such thought and intellectual activity. As a form, the essay is situated somewhat precariously between regulation and possibility; it relies more substantially on epistemologies – ways of coming to know – than other literary genres. Unlike fiction, which relies on narrative to unfold, the essay creates itself through an exploration of and participation in various modes of representation and ways of understanding. Unlike poetry, the essay must rely on a rhythm and schema to encourage meaning with readers that is more varied in purpose and design, and thus more difficult to articulate, particularly over a longer stretch of discourse. Since the work of composition classes is positioned as a cornerstone for the development of critical thinking and writing strategies serving students throughout the university, and since the essay form is utilized throughout the humanities as an essential marker of intellectual achievement, the essay can be productively re-conceptualized as among the most productive forms of liberal arts education and sustained engagement with the world of ideas.

Moreover, I argue that repositioning the essay as intellectual activity connects two primary figures of the university which are typically thought to occupy opposite ends of a spectrum: the intellectual and the student. Each figure uses the essay (in the productive form I detail in Chapter One) to attempt thought – to assay; each produces essays as a key marker of intellectual work and achievement. And as I will argue throughout this dissertation, the essay constructs a dialogic intellectual arena that can unite these figures in shared intellectual inquiry and in shared acts of intellectual writing. I argue that students and scholars are connected through the shared “intellectual arena” the essay creates, as well as through the material acts of writing they pursue. My argument thus asserts a place for composition at the center of the university by valuing the ways that writing assists scholars of all levels in deepening their arguments and ideas.

Broadly speaking, then, this dissertation thus undertakes to widen our scholarship of the essay, the pedagogies surrounding essay-writing, and the work of both students and scholars producing intellectual work within the form. The central extension of the argument I just articulated above resides

in situating student writing as intellectual activity and as work – a crucial understanding if we are to encourage students to use writing as a way of coming to know instead of showing what it is that they already know. Thought of in this way, student-writers are intellectual beings and intellectual forces, not merely consuming knowledge, but producing it. A corollary of this argument is based in my examination of the essay’s reflexive quality. Particularly through working with hybrid essays – the focus of the later chapters of this dissertation – student writers can reap the benefits of this reflexivity as they both develop and refine their generic, rhetorical, and stylistic awareness in ways that broaden their writing repertoires.

A good deal of this dissertation, then, is concerned with investigating examples of hybrid essays – essays which draw on multiple genres and media, multiple formal structures, and multiple ways of communicating. Although such hybrid texts are now often anthologized alongside formally traditional essays, little work has been done to consider what hybrid essays offer that might be different from these more familiar texts. My final two chapters address this need; I explore the complexities that emerge as students confront and oscillate between writing essays that signify as traditional and hybrid. Reading contemporary published essays alongside student essays, I argue that hybrid essays allow a broader understanding of the essay, its goals, and its intellectual possibilities, particularly in the writing classroom where the essay has often been restrictively defined. Pedagogically speaking, I argue that paying attention to and practicing a range of rhetorical strategies and styles of writing assists students in developing as readers and writers capable of sustaining complex, dialogic, and reflexive inquiries and projects.

The essay might seem, to some, to be the unlikely accomplice of the type of knowledge production I am advocating. Particularly in light of the No Child Left Behind legislation, increased state and federal mandates for schools and curricula (including those now extending to higher education), and a heightened testing environment thought to create accountability, the essay is seen by many as only the most banal of forms, a handmaiden to standardized tests and outcomes-based learning. Indeed, the essay has, and continues to be, deployed in this fashion – particularly with regard to the new “essay” writing-

portion of the SATs.² For many, these pressures, coupled with the historical and material realities of teaching labor, combine to reduce the essay to what once was deemed a “theme,” and which now is broadly recognized – especially by students – as the five-paragraph essay.³ As teachers of composition, these realities are familiar and often discouraging to us, as we ask students to move beyond the essays they have written in their secondary education to the “something else” that the university demands. When we say essay, we mean one thing; students often hear (and rightly so, given their educational experiences) something else.

There is no denying this popular and cultural history of the essay as the most formulaic and formatted of forms based on its perceived connection to regurgitation and its ability to “test” correct assimilation of content material. Yet as those who have spent time within the form – writers, philosophers, critics, students – know, the essay carries both a historical and formal potential far beyond the above expectations. Moreover, as Theodor Adorno argues, and as I’ll explore in the first chapter, the ability to question reductive thinking and the systems that produce single-minded disciplinarity inheres most powerfully within the essay. The essay acts as the form of writing that best welcomes writers and thinkers into an “arena of intellectual experience” where ideas can be tested, explored, and pursued.⁴ And the essay, particularly the hybrid essay, is among the most dialogic of forms, exhibiting the rich heteroglossia of language that M.M. Bakhtin describes and that the field of Composition has come to value. My first chapter therefore attempts to replace the ways that “the essay,” broadly conceived, has acted as a placeholder for a range of writing practices by proposing, instead, a revised vision of the essay based in discovery, complexity of thought, dialogue, and reflexivity. I coin the term “essayistic impetus” as a way of describing the epistemological drive toward critical and reflexive knowledge via thinking in

² The actual form of the essay writing portion includes both a 25 minute writing “in the form of an essay” designed to measure the student’s ability to “organize and express ideas clearly, develop and support the main idea, [and] use appropriate word choice and sentence structure.” This writing portion is accompanied by a 35 minute multiple choice section where students must identify and correct error in terms of grammar, usage, syntax, and word choice. For more specifics, see <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about/sat/writing.html>.

³ For a history of the ways the essay became devalued as a form due to pressures such as teaching loads, teacher preparation, and increasingly diverse student populations see both Robert J. Connors, *Composition-Rhetoric : Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, and John Brereton, *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925 : A Documentary History*.

⁴ Theodor Adorno, *The Essay as Form*, 161.

and through writing. Envisioning the essay in this way and valuing an essayistic impetus prompts my argument that the student-writer and the intellectual-critic are intimately connected through their production of essays, a claim which positions composition as the central intellectual pursuit of the academy.

The second chapter moves from the essay as a theoretical possibility to a consideration of the shifting investments that marked textbook production of the 1940's and 1950's – an era not given significant attention in composition studies. I focus on two major textbooks edited by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks – the composition textbook *Modern Rhetoric*, and the literature textbook, *An Approach to Literature* – in order to demonstrate how these authors understood the essay, essayistic style, and the teaching of prose writing from the point of view of both literature and composition. Ultimately, I argue that the changes across several editions of the literature textbooks were dramatically different in kind – even opposed to – those changes that occurred across editions of the composition textbooks. I suggest the possible pedagogical reasons for this discrepancy as well as offer a few salient lessons to be taken from the range of new critical practices evident in these textbooks.

Chapter three examines hybrid, multi-genre essays by public intellectuals Joan Didion and Gloria Anzaldúa alongside hybrid essays authored by student writers. I argue that the forms of these hybrid and experimental essays not only support, but in many ways make possible their particular contents; this is particularly the case as essayists explore issues of subjecthood, the intellectual, and coming to literacy. In like fashion, I argue that students engaged in essay-writing act as public intellectuals exploring issues of identity, their world and their relations to it, and their positions as writers. By turning to student essays produced in a first-year composition class centered on the essay, I chart the increased dialogism, reflexivity, and rhetorical awareness that sustained engagement with the essay brought to several students. Moreover, I contend that working with hybrid essays allows students to develop increased attention to genre, style, and the uses of rhetoric, effectively broadening their writing repertoires.

Chapter four considers another type of hybrid essay: the photographic essay. Since composition classes increasingly make use of multimodal texts, I examine the theoretical relationships of words and

images on the page in terms of both reading activities and composing possibilities. Edward Said and Jean Mohr's collaborative photographic-essay *After the Last Sky* and the significant work on word-image interaction by W.J.T. Mitchell provides the ground for this exploration. Since Said provides an exceptional model of the public intellectual, I explore this more "public" text as exhibiting the essayistic trait of "worldliness" he so valued. Finally, this chapter provides a context for thinking through composition's current interest in (and in some cases, extension to) other modes and media for the production of work.

My final chapter continues to pursue the extension of the essay beyond the page via an examination of the newest "type" of essay-writing: the "essay film." As described by Timothy Corrigan, Philip Lopate, and others, the essay film marks an attempt to adapt the essay's ability to "think on the page" to "thinking on the screen." Through my analysis of a signature essay film, Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil*, and a contemporary essay film, Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*, I argue that the distinctive aesthetics and style of these texts illustrate rich compositional possibilities that can first, act as models for teaching style in the composition classroom, and second, offer a hermeneutics for understanding texts that move beyond the written page. As I have done in earlier chapters, I illustrate how these essays offer an intellectual arena for reflexive thought and I demonstrate the essayistic impetus that drives these texts despite their existence in a different medium. I thus offer the essay film as a theoretical bridge to understanding and confronting the literacy demands and questions raised by media within our field. As increasingly hybrid forms and texts proliferate, they ask us to reconsider the work of the essay – what the essay enables and what we value about that work – even as we simultaneously consider what new forms may add to the repertoire of learning possibilities. Whatever the media in which our students compose, I argue that the essay, in all its varied forms and incarnations, encourages those habits of mind which assist writers of all kinds in pushing thought further. As a composition teacher invested in confronting difficulty, thinking reflexively, and revising both first thoughts and first words, I can think of no better goal to aspire to alongside my students.

1.0 REVISING THE ESSAY: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

The essay has had a long and varied history, yet it remains important as both an occasion for writing and the form that reflexive and exploratory writing often takes – “thinking on the page,” as Phillip Lopate has put it. The term “essay”, however, often signifies remarkably different types of writing – from the philosophical treatise to the college admissions essay. Due to its flexibility and its wide-ranging nature, defining what constitutes an essay remains an elusive task – essays continue to be defined and redefined, often being repurposed or subdivided for specific contexts. Given this situation, composition scholars such as Paul Heilker have called for a “mapping out [of] the spaces between the poles” that separate essays as “pure concepts” from the equally caricaturized expository, school-based writing (205). This dissertation takes up Heilker’s call by putting a range of essays into conversation with one another in order to more fully trace the essay as an intellectual endeavor. Reading theoretical essays by public intellectuals, contemporary hybrid essays composed by professional writers/filmmakers, and student essays produced within institutional settings, I argue for the productive impetus the essay enables. I define this essayistic impetus as an epistemological drive toward critical and reflexive knowledge via thinking in and through writing; I argue that embracing this impetus can help writers of all kinds to think more deeply and carefully.

The juxtaposition of the essays I draw together in this dissertation does justice to the essay’s long and varied history and its remarkable staying power. The essay’s familiar roots begin, of course, with Montaigne, the so-called father of the form, whose writings brought together others’ words and his own in order to reflect on his personal thoughts, his contemporary situation, and the state of the larger world around him. Since Montaigne coined the word in his *Essais*, the form has been lauded for its ability to enact diverse, sometimes competing, aims: to reflect on experience, the natural world, or a series of

observations; to explore a problem or investigate a “mental knot”¹; to convey a writer’s traits of sincerity and genuineness to her readers; to gather observations and ideas, acting as a crucible to test thought and understanding.² Definitions often pinpoint the workaday quality of the essay, yet they also emphasize the essay’s productive tentativeness, which does not try to resolve issues prematurely, and the significant effort required in attempts at learning.³ This epistemological impulse of the essay extends to the essay-writer. Wanting to know more of oneself, one’s surroundings, or one’s place in the world, the essay-writer sets these attempts at knowledge in motion through writing. The essay serves, as Montaigne puts it, as “both a path *of* knowing and a path *to* knowing,” resulting in an epistemological practice that allowed the essayist to “form life” through the acts of writing (Montaigne, qtd. in Fakundiny, 678).⁴

In universities, all of these incarnations of the essay still exist, though often within separate realms. Essays are read in literature classes, though not as frequently as poems, novels, and short stories. And essays are written – particularly in the humanities – by critics and scholars, who may term their work

¹ I borrow this oft-cited image from Philip Lopate’s essay “In Search of the Centaur: The Essay Film.”

² Montaigne alone cannot be credited with the entire lineage of such attempts; the roots of the essay extend beyond Western Europe. 11th century writer Sei Shonagon’s pillow book musings, observations, and reflections constitute an early type of essay; several centuries later, similar traits persist in the commonplace books of 17th century writers, written by both men and women alike.

³ The *OED* provides a helpful tracing of these numerous usages. The verb form of essay was used from 1483 on until its noun incarnation arose as the titles of collections by Montaigne (1580) and Bacon (1597) (essay, n.⁸). Drawn from the French *essayer*, “to assay” (to test or attempt), the essay is taken to be an art, albeit one subjected to a process of trial (and presumably error) as in the definition: “to practice (an art, etc.) by way of trial” (essay, v.¹). This definition offers a ready vision of the essay as working toward something, finding its way through multiple efforts which aspire to the level of art. This is not an easy process, and several definitions emphasize the commitment necessary to such a process. The essay is described as “an endeavor” (essay, n.⁵) and as an act that demands dedicated attention: “to set oneself, undertake, try (*to do* something)” (essay, v.⁵). Such “setting of oneself” is necessary due to the essay’s intimate connection with difficulty, as we see in the definition, “to attempt; to try to do, effect, accomplish, or make (anything difficult)” (essay, v.⁴). Within the usages collected by the *OED* there are also indications of a more scholastic essay. Although definitions such as “a first tentative effort in learning or practice” (essay, n.⁷), “a rough copy, a first draft” (essay, n.^{7b}), or “a trial specimen, a sample, an example; a rehearsal” (essay, n.²) do not seem negative at first, they do isolate the essay as an instrumental type of writing useful only in a limited sphere for a limited time. Here the essay may or may not move beyond the first draft stage that “rehearses” its thoughts. Indeed, these inflections seem connected to early usages by writers where the essay was understood as a composition “originally implying a want of finish” (essay, n.⁸). This range of definitions still resonates in contemporary usage of the terms essay. See “essay” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 20 Aug. 2007 https://sslvpn.pitt.edu/cgi/entry/?DanaInfo=dictionary.oed.com+50078118?query_type=word&queryword=essay&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=gJS2-2ssS7G-5950&hilite=50078118.

⁴ Lydia Fakundiny’s introduction to *The Art of the Essay*, like Philip Lopate’s introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay* and Robert Atwan’s (and guest editors’ – particularly Joyce Carol Oates) introductions to the volumes of *The Best American Essays*, provide valuable introductions to both essays and essayists beyond the scope I am able to consider below.

an essay or an article.⁵ Essays are most conspicuously present, however, in English departments where students work to construct papers which represent both their understanding of a particular subject and the thoughts of others on that subject. Negotiating the demands of the university as well as the protocols of different disciplines, students often juggle multiple forms and types of essays –personal, critical, reflective – each reflecting various understandings of the essay, its long history, and the work that individuals within universities imagine both students and the essay can achieve.

Despite these different understandings and usages, however, I contend that the essay is the central form of the academy. Doubly marked by two different populations of writers – the intellectual and the student – the essay, despite different deployments, audiences, and purposes, nonetheless brings these two figures together in related intellectual pursuits. For the critic, the ‘academic’ essay that bears her name is a way of reading, working with, and making an intervention in the scholarly pursuits of her field. It demonstrates specialization of knowledge and “original” work on the part of its author. Thus, for this writer the essay holds authority and is tied to material issues of promotion and compensation as well as to prestige and commitment to one’s subject. For the student-writer, the essay (often generated in response to the “essay question”) can make visible either a student’s achieved authority or the lack of authority the student-writer has, not only in relation to the ideas of a field but also to the field’s preferred genres of presentation. Often schooled in the makeshift essay – the standardized five- paragraph version which serves a specific educational goal – the college-level student finds that the critical, academic essay presented as a model of writing is different indeed. Positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum, these two writing figures are drawn together by the material essays they both produce, as well as, I argue, a shared purpose of coming to know and exhibiting this understanding.

Studying the intellectual-critic and the student-writer as connected by the form of work they do foregrounds very different systems of production and reception. But developing and sustaining these

⁵ There are obviously crucial differences between each of these types of writing, despite the fact that the names are used somewhat interchangeably. One key difference worth mentioning here is the rhetorical purpose for the article which extends from the writer to a perceived audience of educated peers anxious to learn of new research in a systematic way through a standardized format.

connections is crucial to a richer understanding of composition: the work we do with our students, the writing we ask them to produce, and the writing which we, in turn, produce in the academy to attain, secure, or further our own intellectual positions and our collective projects. The two central questions of this project are posed in terms of both of these writing populations: What do the many uses of the essay suggest about the potential of the essay more broadly? And how might the changing outward shape of many contemporary essays now taught within the composition class re-accentuate the essay's potential for bridging the interpretative acts of reading and writing and the positions of the student and critic as collaboratively engaged in intellectual work?

As made evident by contemporary and popular essayists (Gloria Anzaldúa, Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, and Richard Rodriguez are just a few examples that come to mind), the essay continues to be able to explore the experiences of literacy and ways of understanding the self in rich, complex terms. Part of my answer to the above questions, then, is to consider the other uses to which the essay has been put, uses which extend beyond a privileged, isolated, individuated consciousness to engage – politically, culturally, racially – the world in which the essayist finds herself. To widen Montaigne's observation that the self is the "matter" of the essay, the essayists considered throughout this volume show that *understanding*, broadly construed and often posited via the self, is the essay's primary function. From contemporary essayists to public intellectuals to students writing essays within classrooms, I argue that the difficulties inherent in understanding, and difficulty as an experience that prompts learning, become the salient materiality of the essay – a materiality which unites these figures together in powerful ways.

The following sections of Chapter One establish an intellectual tradition for such an essay. I begin by first considering the ways that the term "essay" serves as a placeholder for competing understandings and investments, particularly within the field of composition. I provide a brief overview of the essay's uses in the academy as well as mark several moments where the essay has reemerged for theoretical scrutiny. I then recommend my own re-conceptualization of the essay and its potential by turning to the work of Theodor Adorno and M.M. Bakhtin – two public intellectuals concerned with the material and social nature of language. Each thinker contributes significantly, I argue, to an

understanding of the essay as a dialogic and intellectual arena where the writer engages the complexities of language and thought. I conclude by summarizing the promise of the essay as an intellectual and epistemological force. The essay I posit here grows out of a tradition which grounds the processes of coming to know expressly in the act of writing essays – a crucial assertion for compositionists, student-writers, and intellectuals alike. In addition to suggesting a positive, rigorous essay that unites writers of all levels within the academy through intellectual activity, I contend that thinking through the essay, its histories, and its possibilities enables us to critically assess the writing we teach, how we value and justify that writing, and how such writing points to larger relationships in institutions and beyond.

1.1 WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT ESSAYS: DEFINITIONS, CONTEXTS, INVESTMENTS

Before proposing my own theoretical and pedagogical framework for the use of an essayistic impetus in writing instruction, it is worth noting the diverse and ongoing attempts to characterize the essay's flexible form. Below I sample a range of thought on the essay – from descriptions of its unique aims and style, to attempts to reimagine its relationship to education within the field of composition. The essay's very flexibility lends itself, I argue, to such re-imaginings and re-purposing. Acknowledging contemporary movements to value and make use of the essay can assist us in advancing productive essayistic practices in a contextualized manner.

I begin, however, with an early example of an “essay,” one that will *not* constitute an essay as conceived by this project, yet a presence that haunts the term “essay” to this day. It is impossible to ignore this spectral “essay” – often called a “theme” – which became required in the freshman English

course standard in most universities since the establishment of English A at Harvard in 1874.⁶ John Brereton's documentary chapter "Writing the Essay" in his useful text *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925* provides a typical instance of a "proficient" essay, cited in full below:

Venus of Melos

In looking at this statue we think, not of wisdom, or power, or force, but just of beauty. She stands resting the weight of her body on one foot, and advancing the other (left) with knee bent. The posture causes the figure to sway slightly to one side, describing a fine curved line. The lower limbs are draped but the upper part of the body is uncovered. (The unfortunate loss of the statue's arms prevents a positive knowledge of its original attitude.) The eyes are partly closed, having something of a dreamy languor. The nose is perfectly cut, the mouth and chin are moulded in adorable curves. Yet to say that every feature is of faultless perfection is but cold praise. No analysis can convey the sense of her peerless beauty. (Brereton, 527)

Not only was this essay rated as proficient, it was used as one of two samples that constituted "excellence" in a 1912 range finder used to measure successful writing (526).⁷ Although the piece is certainly coherent enough, it does not exhibit those traits of the essay that I will discuss more fully below: an attempt to think through an issue, test an idea, or follow a particular line of thought. It works by exposition and description ("The eyes are partly closed"), yoked to a heightened vocabulary ("having something of a dreamy languor"), and a distant tone ("No analysis can convey the sense of her peerless beauty"). As a short piece of expository writing it might succeed; however, it does not constitute an essay (generically) nor does it make use of an essayistic impetus (as an epistemology.)

Essay-themes were of course written by students both before and after this anonymous student tackled the subject of the Venus of Melos. And it's important to acknowledge the circumstances that, in

⁶ James Berlin notes that the course was originally created as a temporary stopgap which responded to over half of the entering class failing the new Freshman Exam. Prompted by the desire to ensure that "the new open university would not become too open," the entrance exams also created a new assumption: "the ability to write was something the college student ought to bring with him from his preparatory school" (23).

⁷ Outside the scope of this project, there is more work to be done in comparing the way that such essay-themes were historically scored – often relating longer and more literary work with greater success – and the perhaps similar ways that the College Board scores the new SAT essay component.

many cases, dictated the writing of daily and fortnightly themes: the pressures of burgeoning enrollments, increased class size, inexperienced teachers, and lack of instructional support chief among them. As I move to discuss composition's attempts to reappropriate the essay for student use, however, it's useful to have such an example in mind.

It's also important to have in mind some of the mid-20th century composition practices that arose under similar pressures. In *Common Ground* Kurt Spellmeyer charts the ways that as academic disciplines became increasingly specialized they sought to achieve "comprehensiveness by means of maximum exclusivity," resulting in rigid and compartmentalized boundaries between types of work (14). The writing students were asked to produce mirrored these disciplinary demarcations. Supporting these "compartmentalized boundaries" were now familiar taxonomies that were easy to disseminate and grade, such as the select-narrow-expand invention system and the modes of discourse. To make writing more easily manageable and taught, written discourse was often divided into exposition, description, narration, and argumentation. During moments such as these, the essay, and its combination of types of writing, was distinctly out of fashion.

Scholarship in the late 1980's and early 1990's, however, returned the essay to critical discussion. Composition theorists positioned the essay as writing that, with engaged scrutiny, could achieve not only the goals of successful writing, but also the goals championed by public intellectualism: critical thinking, democratic citizenry, and ideological critique (Haefner; Heilker *Essay*; Kauffmann; Spellmeyer; Winterowd). Extending both contemporary theories of writing and literary traditions of the essay, this work was crucial in beginning to more fully theorize the essay and its possibilities. For example, in his 1989 article, "Essaying as Unmethodical Method," R. Lane Kauffmann related the essay to the realms of philosophy and theory in order to chart the historical differences and intersections between the 'essay' and the 'system', or the "conflict between fragmentary and totalizing modes of thought" (232). Kauffmann argued that through its "unmethodical method" the essay remains the "most propitious form for interdisciplinary inquiry" by way of its capacity to make visible and challenge disciplinary boundaries instead of merely "shuttling between" them (238).

Kauffmann's work is indicative of much of the work of this period which aimed to take the essay seriously and think through what its method offered writers and students alike. Critics praised the essay's "radical loss of certainty" (Spellmeyer) and its "yearning for conceptuality and intellectuality" (Said), while others attempted to map how the essay worked (Hesse; Recchio; Zeiger).⁸ Beginning in 1986, Robert Atwan began editing the series *The Best American Essays*, collections which continue to serve as a sample of the range of essay-writing available in this country. The introductions to these volumes, combined with important introductions by Lydia Fakundiny and Phillip Lopate in their edited collections of essays, helped to more clearly map the ways the essay could be understood and valued.

Contemporary composition scholarship has, at moments, extended this work begun in the 1980's. The previously mentioned work by Spellmeyer, for example, is an attempt to reimagine the exciting intellectual work the essay can engender. Spellmeyer values the essay because he believes it can increase dialogism and the ability to question disciplinary specialization, practices which in turn can encourage students to use writing to question their place within both society and the university. Writing that the "pedagogy of methods and standards misrepresents the highly provisional character of both our 'communities' and their 'conventions'" Spellmeyer warns that, "the more we attempt to ready beginning writer for activities which are profoundly mechanistic and undialogical, the less prepared they will be to produce knowledge for themselves" (196). By emphasizing the essay's impulse to question received knowledge and its ability to position the writer as an inquirer, Spellmeyer argues for an essayistic epistemology to assist students and teachers in pursuing critical reflection.

Composition scholar Richard Miller also extends the range of the essay in advocating its use with university students. His description of the essay argues that:

the essay might be profitably conceived of in the following ways: as a means for slowing thought down; as a technology for generating reflection; as a practice of entertaining other possibilities than the ones that seem the easiest to defend and substantiate; as a way

⁸ Several of these essays are collected in the useful volume *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre*, edited by Alexander J. Butrym.

to explore issues of such seriousness and importance that one never reaches that point where ‘nothing more needs to be said’ (“On Asking” 150).

This definition of the essay stands in contrast to the “Venus of Melos” essay above. Miller’s definition is also useful within the broader context of his work since his writing often takes the form of reflective and compelling essays which explore issues of “seriousness and importance.”⁹

My work in this dissertation builds on these theoretical approaches that revalue the essay as a form that encourages rich epistemologies in the face of pedagogies of “methods and standards,” as Spellmeyer puts it. Concentrating on such epistemologies is particularly important given our present moment. As schools at all levels continue to be scrutinized for quantifiable “outcomes,” as the culture of schooling continues to shift away from introspection and the study of the arts to more “testable” material, as this environment of high-stakes testing pressures students and teachers into predictable (and easily score-able) patterns of thought, and as the scaffolding for these practices strengthens its ties to the goals of capitalism, thinking about how to use writing to not only solve problems but to also deepen understanding and awareness of the diversity of thought offers one pedagogy for countering these measures. In many ways, then, the essay presents an important alternative to overly determined and reductive ways of thinking and writing which have become particularly entrenched in the wake of the Spellings Report and legislation instituted by No Child Left Behind.

Turning to essay writing is one way to encourage students’ participation in complex, reflexive, and dialogic patterns of thought. Moreover, privileging the essay as intellectual production allows students to pursue their own diverse intellectual projects and commitments within a sphere of engaged essayists both within and outside of the academy. If, as Montaigne claimed, the self is the matter of the book, a parallel emphasis of the essay is to extend its reach – its view and its testing nature – to the larger world. Students writing in essayistic fashion are thus also invited to act as public intellectuals; in connecting their individual speculation to the larger, material implications of thought, their essays can

⁹See especially Miller’s most recent book *Writing at the End of the World* which, in essayistic fashion, explores writing and writing instruction in the aftermath of such events as the 9/11 attacks and the Columbine school shooting.

move beyond towered rooms to the street, the city, and in our time, the global, diverse, and technologically connected world. Like the scholar who is hopeful of moving beyond esoteric claims to the implications such claims have on the world and its citizens, the student-essayist may also advance these goals. Such projects are particularly essential given the promising pattern of interdisciplinary work within the academy. As such cross-disciplinary work continues to grow, forms such as the essay can support these intellectually diverse ventures by providing a ready and sufficiently complex and flexible form of expression.

Refiguring the essay and the essays students produce as an alternative to increasingly instrumental and teleological education also dovetails with the commitments to social justice and progressive education many compositionists hold. For example, in *Introducing English* James Slevin calls for a greater connection of students' writing to critical literacy practices and issues of social justice in order to combat the historical culture of improvement aimed at student-writing. Slevin argues:

What higher education needs is a conception of Composition as a culture of inquiry, not improvement; as a site of learning concerned more with interpretation than judgment; as a vehicle for intellectual work committed to problematizing and not problem solving, to complicating and not resolving issues, to studying and measuring the work that faculty and students do together. (265)

Slevin's advocacy of student production of "intellectual work committed to problematizing and not problem solving" connects with claims he makes elsewhere in his book, especially his argument that writing and reading are always socially and historically situated and thus the site of larger influences and contexts – including issues of access. Slevin radically repositions composition and student writing not as tasks driven by lack, the need for improvement, or service elsewhere in the academy or world, but instead as the very work that epitomizes intellectual activity. Indeed, Slevin advocates that students do the kind of work and analysis as composition theorists; they need "consciously and rigorously to examine their discursive predicament," including the discursive choices available to them (150).

Coupled with the theoretical revisions of the essay and its possibilities over the last fifteen years or so, are specific attempts to revise the essay for use within schools. This pedagogical scholarship is perhaps best exemplified by the ongoing attempts by composition scholar Paul Heilker, a theorist who has been writing about the uses of the essay for over a decade, to describe the theoretical potential of the essay as well as to detail his uses of the essay within writing classrooms. Heilker's text, *The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form*, is an early account of such scholarship and thus marks an important addition to the field. The book makes the case for the essay as an "alternative form of composition" in contrast to what Heilker names the thesis/support model of writing instruction. Although Heilker also turns to Adorno and Bakhtin, figures I discuss later in this chapter, his analyses are somewhat truncated in order to provide a survey of theorists of the essay (including, among others, Montaigne, Huxley, and Graham Good.) In my analyses below, my work picks up where Heilker's leaves off; I offer more detailed analysis of Adorno's and Bakhtin's theories of the essay, including those features of their work which prove particularly helpful in accounting for and describing the hybrid essay in particular.

Before introducing my procedure for these analyses, however, I will briefly summarize the most recent work on the essay to fill in the context that surrounds this project. An excellent example of a parallel project which informs my own is Jacqueline Royster's 2000 book *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*. Assessing the uses of essay writing across generations of African American women writers, Royster also reclaims the essay as "an accommodating nonfiction form" which offers not only the benefits and "traditions of rhetorical prowess but also of traditions of intellectualism and community leadership" (11). Royster's definition of the essay – including its "exploratory, unfinished, open-ended" thinking; the variable combination of the "writer's knowledge, experience, and insight"; and the essay's "protean" form which "lends itself easily to an incorporation of a full range of expressive and organizational devices" – offers an important repositioning of the essay as a rhetorical, intellectual, ideological, and aesthetic genre offering flexibility to writers from diverse positions with diverse purposes (23).

Along these lines I must also note Heilker's recent article published in the December 2006 issue of *College Composition and Communication*. Given his long commitment to the genre, this article offers his most careful and situated argument concerning the essay focused on the larger changes in composition curricula which could be called upon to support the radical potential of the essay. Heilker's recent piece is admirable in that he charts his twenty years of working with the genre and the difficulties of understanding the expansive potential of the essay without reifying the essay as an easy save-all for writers and composition teachers. Indeed, Heilker's narration of his own unfolding understanding of the essay – he moves from seeing the essay as anti-genre and pure freedom, to the essay as the “good” binary opposite to the flawed expository writing, to a recognition of the many “hybrid” essays that negotiate these two poles – demonstrates the difficulty of working with and teaching the essay, as well as suggests the particular emphasis that my project develops.

Pedagogically, Heilker's description of the essay that he now provides his students shifts from a list of imperatives to a range of qualities or strategies that the essay “may” employ (193).¹⁰ In short, Heilker wishes to:

rescue the essay from the years of associations students have with school-based writing – to divorce the essay from the themes, formulas, correctness, punishment, and drudgery that still seems to characterize expository writing instruction for too many students and teachers. (201)

Although Heilker is clearly invoking writing instruction that produces the sort of empty expository writing such as the 1912 essay I've reproduced above, he also argues that writing essays can allow students to avoid the “single perspectives and facile rejection of alternative views” that mark, he argues, the current American political climate (205). What is valuable about Heilker's most recent addition to

¹⁰ Heilker's list provides an excellent starting point for new practitioners and teachers of the essay. Although he erects his descriptions of what the essay may do as non-hierarchical, I would argue that two of his points – “the essay may problematize or complicate its subject rather than simplifying it” and “the essay may pose difficult questions that the writer attempts to work through on paper” – are actually more epistemologically essential to the work of the essay than the other, more stylistic or secondary characteristics he offers. See Heilker's bulleted list, page 193.

scholarship on the essay is its insistence that we should continue to place the essay at both the center of our classrooms and the center of (at least some) of our scholarship. This is to say, we should continue to construct a critical praxis using the essay and we should continue to question this praxis instead of imagining the essay as a fixed and static entity.

Richard Miller's text *As If Learning Mattered* equally emphasizes this point and situates the work Heilker recommends squarely within the first year classroom.¹¹ Part of Miller's assertion rests on the realization that teachers must realize that much of their time will be spent teaching entry-level courses, and not the highly specialized advanced courses of which they dream. He writes:

this shift in the job market [more teaching of entry-level classes by those now entering the job market] is better understood as an opportunity for anyone truly interested in becoming a public intellectual, anyone committed to improving the educational chances of the disenfranchised, and anyone who has more than an academic interest in the work of theorizing and disentangling encounters with difference. (208)

As I have argued above, Miller also unites the "public intellectual" with the beginning university writing students present in entry-level classes through the work of composition. Miller's corrective emphasizes that this work will (and must) take place primarily in the first-year writing classroom, one key site where scholars and practitioners of the essay meet.¹²

Both Miller's and Heilker's significant commitment to the essay over many years demonstrates that the essay has rich possibilities to offer even within our contemporary contexts. The millennial year presented *The Best American Essays of the Century* (co-edited by Atwan and Joyce Carol Oates and somewhat predictable in terms of its canonical selections) and thus a moment when even this type of endeavor has paused to take stock. 2005 marked the publication of G. Douglas Atkins's volume *Tracing the Essay: Through Experience to Truth*, an economical literary history of the essay in broad strokes

¹¹ Heilker's recent article, like Miller's 1996 article "The Nervous System," provides a model of scholarship written in essayistic fashion. This is also the case in Miller's *Writing at the End of the World* as a whole, the text which contains a revised version of "The Nervous System."

¹² As I hope is clear, I mean to suggest that both students and teachers should be figured as occupying both of these roles over the course of a term.

which argues for the essay as “embodied truth” (125). In the last five years, nearly a dozen dissertations have explored the various types of essay-writing present in university classrooms. These texts continue to illustrate the juncture of scholarship about the essay between composition theory, rhetoric, literary studies, and creative writing pedagogy.¹³ Oates, in introducing the volume, writes that the contemporary essay provides a heightened

attention to detail that allows the reader to see, hear, witness, as if first hand, what the essayist has witnessed. Though this is ‘informal’ writing, there is no lack of form.

Postmodernist strategies of fragmentation and collage have replaced that of exposition, summary, and argument” (xxii).

Oates’ definition attempts to describe a wide range of essays, including the many essays in the volume that might be classified as hybrid – essays by Zora Neale Hurston, John McPhee, Joan Didion, Alice Walker, and Adrienne Rich, for example. Although Oates contends that argument as a discursive feature is no longer deployed by such writers, I will argue throughout this dissertation that the “argument” of these essays – or arguments – still exist, although represented differently than in a thesis or topic sentence occurring at a predictable time and place.

I must also briefly address Oates’ assertion that “postmodernist strategies of fragmentation and collage” have replaced more expository writing. Although this description certainly applies to some of the essays collected by Atwan and Oates – Adrienne Rich’s “Notes on Lying” seems an apt example – the hybrid essays I explore below make use of a range of genres and strategies. I will deal with the question of postmodern strategies and genres in the section below on Bakhtin; suffice it now to say that although the hybrid essays I discuss are in dialogue with postmodernism – particularly the postmodern sense of a complex and sometimes multiplicitous self – they extend beyond the limiting aesthetic associations often (and usually mistakenly) attributed to postmodern writing. As I demonstrate in my analyses of these

¹³ See particularly dissertations by Rochelle Harris (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Sarah Tredway Allen (University of South Carolina), and Susan Anne Johnson (University of Massachusetts – Amherst) which are in conversation with my arguments here.

essays, the elements of collage, juxtaposition, and montage (in essay films) join with expository (and other) discourses to contribute constitutively to the meaning of the piece.

The contemporary returns to the essay I've summarized in this section clearly suggest that there is more crucial work to be done. Despite such renewed theoretical and practical interest in the essay, I argue that what is missing from this body of work is a theory and praxis of the hybrid multi-genre essay's particular intellectual opportunities. This dissertation attempts to unite the theoretical and the pedagogical possibilities that hybrid essays afford in order to, as Doug Hesse has recently put it, "save a place for essayistic literacy" for reasons that are "rhetorical, intellectual, political, and psychological" (48). The essay and essayist literacy I describe through the combined lenses of Adorno and Bakhtin in the following sections provides a context and method for heeding Hesse's call while simultaneously exemplifying many of the beliefs that the field of Composition has come to broadly value.¹⁴ With more than a century of writing practices behind us, composition classrooms now generally encourage certain key goals no matter the specific practices of a particular classroom: revision, critical thought, attention to language, recursivity and reflexivity, and the ability to deploy a range of rhetorical strategies and types of writing to best achieve a purpose for a particular audience (to name just a few.) But in addition to uniting these values in writing, the essay also extends these values. The rest of this chapter therefore offers one route toward intellectually recapturing the promise of the essay to do a different and better type of work in undergraduate writing education.

The first text I chart below is Theodor Adorno's difficult and rich theorization, "The Essay as Form." Highlighting the features of the essay Adorno privileges – its playful and independent nature, reflexive movement, and the exploration of difficulty – I argue that Adorno's heretofore unexplored formulation of the thinker converted into an "arena of intellectual experience" offers a fruitful metaphor for both the student and the critic within the university, each producing scholarly work within a broader community of thinkers, each testing their knowledge as they go. I argue that the hybrid essay in particular

¹⁴ Hesse's article wrests the term "essayistic literacy" from other usages which, like many deployments of the word "essay," flatten the term's history and substitute it for any nonfiction writing of a certain length. My use of the term essayistic literacy, as I hope will be clear given the emphases of this project, is in line with Hesse's usage.

emphasizes the features of the essay that Adorno values and provides a model of the intellectual arena that can unite ideas and thinkers – especially the teacher and student as constructing collaborative knowledge. To describe the work that takes place in the intellectual arenas of both essays and classrooms, I define a guiding “essayistic impetus.”

The second text I turn to is M.M. Bakhtin’s equally provocative “Discourse in the Novel.”¹⁵ I situate Bakhtin as enriching the work of genre studies taken up within composition through his focus on the social nature of language. In tracing Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia, hybridization, and incorporated genres, I demonstrate the degree to which these discursive practices are part and parcel of the essay, broadly speaking, and the hybrid essay, more specifically. Moreover, I illustrate the ways that Bakhtin’s recasting of intention and style can productively pertain to the student-writer and the ways in which writing is accented by a dialogized background. Finally, I argue that hybrid essays especially exemplify the dialogic interaction of discourse in our “multi-linguaged world” in ways similar to the novel that Bakhtin privileges. This dialogic interaction is essential to the term “essayistic impetus” I coin in the previous section on Adorno.

Particularly since Adorno and Bakhtin serve as exemplary models of public intellectuals whose ideas have influenced multiple disciplines and whose contributions continue to influence contemporary scholarship, and since they were contemporaries concerned with the ideological and cultural work of language, writing, and its material history, their ideas about prose writing provide a dynamic and meaningful context for the essay. By uniting their visions of writing as a means of thought connected to material and discursive reality, I erect a theory of the essay that can sustain the vital intellectual work of the academy across educational levels and across disciplines. Enhancing our sense of the essay’s intellectual possibility can invigorate and expand pedagogies for reading and writing in this productive form. Both Adorno’s intellectual arena and Bakhtin’s dialogic interaction between heteroglot discourses

¹⁵ Like Adorno, Bakhtin’s work is far-reaching and extremely suggestive. Although I focus my discussion on “Discourse in the Novel” in this project, the broad premises of Bakhtin’s work inform my explication and argument. See particularly Bakhtin’s essay “Speech Genres,” which presents Bakhtin’s later work on describing and classifying discourse.

provide intellectually rigorous models which I use to reconfigure the essay as an open, flexible genre instead of a demonstration of instrumental schooling. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, teaching the essay in this way and encouraging students to work with a range of essays results in increased rhetorical, generic, and stylistic dexterity while at the same time providing a type of bridge to emerging forms and the attendant literacy practices they necessitate.

1.2 ADORNO

First published in 1958, Adorno's "The Essay as Form" argues for imagining the essay as an intellectual arena and thus provides fruitful ground for reevaluating the essay's possibility within the university. As Adorno scholar Simon Jarvis notes in his book devoted to Adorno's career, Adorno considered this short essay "one of the most important statements of his thought" due particularly to the ways that many of the "central aims of his thought are not merely practicable within the essay form, but actually demanded by it" (138). Given that much of Adorno's scholarship, particularly his literary and musical criticism, took the form of the essay as its mode, this reflection on the uses of the essay is both clarifying and apt. Moreover, Adorno's "The Essay as Form" extends the lineage of 20th century scholarship on the essay, responding in part to Georg Lukács earlier essay I explore briefly below.

As part of the Frankfurt School of thinkers, Adorno undertakes a Marxist project; accordingly, he is particularly interested in how the essay might fulfill or inform critical and utopian trajectories through allowing and extending thought. This is particularly the case in the way that the essay counters, or makes evident the distance between, systematic thought and its opposite. Moreover, the essay resists the "identity thinking" that Adorno reacts against throughout his writings in that the essay recognizes the ephemeral, transitory, and contingent without subsuming these realities to an over-arching universal. In this way, the essay also resists the exchange-value commodification demanded by capitalism and, instead, provides a way forward for education to stress the characteristics of autonomous, complex, and thus

politically attuned, thought.¹⁶ The intellectual arena provided by the essay offered an alternative to the popular culture industry which, Adorno argued, created a cycle based on the creation of consumption needs fulfilled, in turn, by capitalism. Such a cycle contributed to the domestication and manipulation of publics and to the debasement of critical, political thought. Critical thought which cannot be dominated, subsumed, or made to blindly serve authority – combined with pedagogies both in school and in the public sphere which stressed engaged social action, as Adorno advocated in his essay “Education after Auschwitz” – offered an alternative to the mechanisms of capitalism, the techniques of positivist science, and the failure to act in the face of unspeakable horror. As Edward Said notes, Adorno’s own resistance to these realities and to their pursuant “false totalities is not just to say that they are inauthentic but in fact to write, to *be* an alternative through subjectivity, albeit subjectivity addressed to philosophic issues” since critical thought contains, as Adorno himself noted, “the force of protest” (“Adorno as Lateness Itself,” 202). In this way, Adorno not only offers a theory of the essay as a radical possibility, but demonstrates such possibility through his commitment to the form. Given his insistence that education played a central role in structuring society’s realities, the use of the essay to achieve complex thought, civic awareness, and political action seems compatible with Adorno’s aims.¹⁷

Others concerned with recuperating the essay as an intellectual tool in the ways I’ve just describe above have also turned to Adorno’s foundational piece. From a literary perspective, G. Douglas Atkins includes Adorno in his wide-ranging general history and characterization of the essay. As mentioned above, R. Lane Kauffmann argues for Adorno’s “unmethodical method” of the essay as a tool of thought by providing a helpful history of contemporary scholarship on the essay in both German and French. Paul Heilker, as already discussed, turns to Adorno as a way to emphasize the essay’s anti-scholastic chrono-logic, features which can help reclaim the intellectual work of the essay for student-writers. For

¹⁶ See Henry W. Pickford’s essay “The Dialectic of Theory and Praxis” for a helpful tracing of Adorno’s thought throughout his career, as well as a discussion of the ways that Adorno advocated for education practices that would help develop a “politically mature” population.

¹⁷ A contemporary connection between Adorno’s theories, the atrocities of the Holocaust, and the more recent violations in the Abu Ghraib prison has been advanced by Henry Giroux in his 2004 article “What Might Education Mean After Abu Ghraib: Revisiting Adorno’s Politics of Education.”

composition scholars working on the essay and advocating its use with students, Adorno has proved among the most helpful of thinkers.

My work below explores the idea of the intellectual arena as one of Adorno's most useful contributions to essay scholarship, yet an idea that has been largely overlooked. Adorno's sense of the essay as the site where thinkers are converted into intellectual arenas is particularly helpful given my focus on the hybrid essay which, I argue, provides a particularly clear model of the essay as intellectual arena. Moreover, most theorists have failed to focus on Adorno's privileging of the student as the figure who might best engage difficulty and complexity holistically (instead of moving first from simple thought to complex thought.) In the next several pages, I take up this important idea and show how students might occupy this position as junior intellectuals, uniting students and teachers in collaborative intellectual activity. I define this sensibility – to think, to know, and to reflect, as they are each expressed in writing – as an essayistic impetus. And I provide one particular pedagogy which demonstrates both this impetus and the intellectual arena Adorno describes. In order to situate readers within Adorno's thought, however, I will first provide a brief description of the essay; I will then enumerate the central points Adorno makes in "The Essay as Form," as well as contextualize this essay's relationship to Lukács' earlier work.

Broadly speaking, Adorno scrutinizes the essay as it exists within a sphere essential for teachers and students of writing – the academy. Although the academic sphere can often have little patience for more speculative investigations, Adorno argues that the essay acts as an important reminder to the academy of an unfilled intellectual freedom, since the essay does not permit its domain to be prescribed. Adorno writes, for example:

Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done...Luck and play are essential to the essay...It says what is at issue and stops where it feels itself complete – not where nothing is left to say. (152)

In this characteristic description of the essay, Adorno acknowledges its self-sufficiency, independence, and ability to form itself; the essay creates its own world and circumscribes that world when “it feels itself complete.” Adorno characterizes the spirit of the essay as playfully and spontaneously enlivening the sparks of “what others have done” in order to fuel the fire of ideas. The essay, as Adorno understands it, thus reinvigorates the voices and ideas of others while at the same time creating its own arguments – two goals often desired by writing teachers. Moreover, since the essay “does not permit its domain to be prescribed,” the essay is particularly adept at fostering interdisciplinary projects and connections.

Essential to the essay’s ability to gather multiple ways of understanding and thus critique larger systems is the way the essay focuses beyond individuals to the broader historical and cultural world. Several traits of the essay assist this connection and are thus worth noting here. First, Adorno accentuates the type of thinking encouraged by the essay, noting particularly its tendency to penetrate its matter without relying solely on another referent, or referring ideas “back to something else.” Likewise, Adorno reminds us that the essay re-appropriates a space between binary classifications, a space in which thought can “penetrate deeply,” circulate and percolate, and not be forced into easy and perfunctory closure. The result is that the dialogic and interactive way meaning accumulates in the essay allows the essay to “force[...] these meanings on farther” (160). Second, Adorno comments on the essay’s method. He notes that since the essay resists a linear and stable method, it embraces the changing, the ephemeral, and the mediated. It is because the essay emphasizes a particular kind of thought and method that it not only can extend its purview beyond both disciplinary boundaries and individual consciousness, but that it fosters anti-scholasticism and thus offers a kind of intellectual “heresy.”

These ideas both build on, and in certain ways challenge, Georg Lukács’ 1910 “On the Nature and Form of the Essay.” Although a somewhat mystical text, Lukács’ text is helpful in differentiating between the essay’s commitment to the “road” thought takes and not the “end” or conclusion. This theory pinpoints the essay’s particular contribution as the way in which the longing for the stability of one system or way of knowing (the end of the journey, the fixity of science, and the predictability of judgment) is held in tension with – but exceeded by – the essay as a new and distinct creation always

emerging in spite of solidified systems, emerging as the road along which the journey unfolds, and resulting, finally, in “a coming-alive” made possible by the process of judging, itself, and not the verdict (18).¹⁸ Adorno’s theory, however, attributes a more radical potential to the essay in terms of its “radical heresy” that challenges totalizing systems. This line of thought is in dialogue with Adorno’s theory of negative dialectics: the aesthetic essay he describes rejects ultimate synthesis in favor of the fissures of thought and the productivity of paradox and irony.

Such an idea of parody, irony, and paradox as central to the essay is important to both theorists, since each of these stances provides a sense of critical distance and scrutiny important to non-systematic thought. Such an ironic distance – to school writing as forceful, sometimes coercive, instruments of schooling, for example – provides students room to move within the shared intellectual arena I will describe below. Students can thus occupy an ongoing conversation larger than themselves while simultaneously positioning themselves at a critical distance from this conversation, from their earlier schoolwork and/or earlier essays, and from their previous experience. In this way, an ironic stance combined with the collaborative meaning-making that takes place in a knowledge arena supports both critical scrutiny and generous collaboration.

As I’ve sketched above, then, Adorno’s focus on the essay and its possibilities coincides with the inquiries that marked much of his scholarship: a focus on situated, material reality; critiques of rationalism, positivism, and systematic knowledge; and the uses of philosophical and reflexive thought in critiquing capitalistic society. “The Essay as Form” is thus a key text for the ways that Adorno extends these critical commitments to writing, to public intellectuals, and most importantly, to students. Based on these key traits of the essay – its intellectual freedom and desire to unite individual thought with material reality, its ability to move beyond binary thinking, its anti-scholasticism, and its ability to critique

¹⁸ Both pressures may be interestingly related to recent criticisms of the academic/critic’s negligible role in relation to a larger public and public discourse. Particularly if the redeeming system here is figured as monopoly capitalism grounded in business and individualist ideologies, academics are often portrayed as unable (or unwilling) to convert ideas into discrete (consumable) facts. Juggling these charges in our own professional lives, Lukács’ formulation of the essay suggests that we extend this conversation to those entering the university systems, making a point to ask student writers how they feel the pressures of larger systems that demark both the types of ideas which are valuable as well as the most aesthetically valuable ways in which these ideas should be relayed.

traditional method – Adorno constructs a metaphor of the essay as an “intellectual arena” which brings ideas and the thinker together in exciting and provocative ways. I next turn to this metaphor, to Adorno’s description of the ideal essay reader who tackles these challenges, and to the challenges that the essay poses to readers due to its precarious form. I argue that attending to these overlooked elements of Adorno’s rich theory can present both teachers and students fresh ways of conceptualizing the essay’s possible work. In the last part of this section, I offer a brief overview of a methodology I have developed as one example of how to construct essayistic writing in the fashion of Adorno’s intellectual arena.

1.2.1 The Intellectual Arena

As mentioned above, essential to the essay providing a fruitful site for critical and inquisitive discovery and thought is the way that words and ideas refract and inflect one another in dialogic fashion. Moreover, compared to other types of writing, the essay “proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically” in its quest to challenge conventional method and thought (160-1). The essay encourages words to interactively define one another; the essay eschews atomistic separation and over-delimited conceptualization in favor of the “reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience” (160). For Adorno, this reciprocity – of words, concepts, and thought – is the intellectual pursuit par excellence. Instead of a linear development of thought, concepts develop in play with each other, interweaving, Adorno writes, “as in a carpet... [in which] the fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture” (160). This intellectual methodology – seeking complexity and density of thought which develop interactively – is a crucial aspect of Adorno’s theory of the essay.

The intellectual arena Adorno describes and relates to the essay is the site of support for this methodology. Adorno writes:

...the thinker does not think, but rather transforms himself into an arena of intellectual experience, without simplifying it. While even traditional thought draws its impulses from such experience, such thought by its form eliminates the remembrance of these impulses... In the essay discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context...

Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration. It is a force field, just as under the essay's glance every intellectual artifact must transform itself into a force field. (160-1)

Another way to put Adorno's first point is that the essay conceived as an intellectual arena allows the thinker to transcend herself to more fully realize the potential of thought itself. Just as the essay transforms thinking from product into process, the essay's intellectual arena extends beyond the individual. In both cases, such an extension makes visible the processes by which we think without removing thought itself from its material, ongoing reality.

In the quotation above, Adorno also describes the development of the essay's arena as a force field which creates a readable context. This charged and interactive site is motivated by the utopian impulse of pursuing a situational aim instead of an endpoint of analysis. To emphasize this point, Adorno clarifies that the essay does not work by stacking discrete bits of thought or idea in order to arrive at a teleological end; instead, ideas are drawn into fundamentally charged inter-meaning with one another. Thus, the elements of the essay crystallize as they come into contact with one another and the essay creates, instead, a provocative conversation.

Three observations follow from Adorno's metaphor of the essay as intellectual arena. First, as alluded to above, the essay radically questions thought as a linear and continuous construct through foregrounding the dialogical inter-meaning of concepts. This questioning of thought is the essay's "epistemological motive;" it is frequently carried out by one of the essay's distinguishing features – engaging and juxtaposing concepts which might otherwise seem paradoxical or unrelated. As Adorno contends, the essay "thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the fissures, rather than by smoothing them over" (164). Placing discontinuity – the fissures and fragments – at its center, the essay challenges singular and totalized ways of knowing via its central epistemological goal.

Second, Adorno claims that "the essay develops thoughts differently from discursive logic" and in this way moves beyond such rhetorical principles as logic, subordination, and linear development

through its ability to construct an assemblage of meanings drawn together through coordination.¹⁹ The key to this process is reflexivity: “the essay, unlike discursive thought, does not proceed blindly, automatically, but at every moment it must reflect on itself” (170). Reflexivity acts as the primary method for critiquing established systems of thought and perception, particularly as they become solidified in cultural hierarchies and forms of knowledge. Yet the essay also refuses to spare itself from this deliberation. The essay must continuously reflect on itself, the ways of knowing it has established, and its relation to other cultural processes in order to remain mobile and responsive instead of static.

Finally, the essay’s success as an intellectual arena is inextricably linked to Adorno’s assertion that it is the process of writing, itself, which determines the conditions for the essay. Like the historical traces of theory, experience, and the social the essay engages and seeks to understand, the essay becomes situated in history via its conditional production through the act of writing. The essay presents itself not as a creation (a totalizing concept, Adorno argues) but instead as a conditional construction, a testing performed in constellation fashion. Gathering ideas together in constellations illustrates the essay’s commitment to non-totality and dialogized, rather than binary, constructions. This is what I am calling the *essayistic impetus*: an epistemological drive (Adorno would say “motive”) toward critical and reflexive knowledge via thinking in and through writing.

1.2.2 Interpreting the Essay’s Intellectual Arena: Hermeneutics, Reading, and Readers

Although I’ve gestured to the classroom above, Adorno’s theorizations necessitate more attention to their practical implications. What does all this mean for the essays that we teach our university students – the essays that we read and those that we ask them, often weekly, to write? What familiarity do the essays Adorno describes bear to the essays anthologized in our readers, to the stacks of “papers” awaiting our

¹⁹ Whether this assemblage constructs a form and logic outside rhetoric entirely, or whether we may imagine it as a different type of rhetoric entirely depends on how we define and redefine rhetoric(s) and its relation to the field of Composition. Adorno seems to suggest that the radically reflexive and changeable nature of the essay may indeed be outside of “rhetoric,” although the essay is not outside contemplating itself via its interaction with the systems of knowledge and discourses that surround it.

comments on our desks? Can the essay's radical potential be realized in the university, in the writing classroom, in the individual pieces of writing our students author?

What is essential to me in Adorno's theorization of the essay is that – despite its instability, its arbitrariness, its susceptibility to misinterpretation – the essay is committed to thought. And fostering thought and the processes of reflective, intellectual activity is the mission of a liberal arts education. Or at least I believe this to be my mission, particularly in our contemporary moment when the pressures on the educational system threaten to flatten and dissipate thought in favor of those “discrete bits of thought” that easily demonstrate results. Adorno's description of the essay as an intellectual arena brings together the figures I want to unite –student and teacher, writer and reader, people interested in questioning themselves and questioning the world around them. Drawing these figures into closer proximity and positing an intellectual space where concepts can be tested and explored allows all those involved to explore, discover, and grow in a community that fosters curiosity and awareness.

For me, the essay provides the concrete ground on which to build such a community. At its very core, the essay critiques the forms of Cartesian thought which prescribe beginning with the simplest concepts instead of the most difficult. The essay takes difficulty and complexity as guiding principles as it “insists that a matter be considered, from the very first, in its whole complexity” (Adorno, 162). Most of all, I'm exceedingly encouraged by Adorno's claim that it is the student who is most likely to embrace this tendency. Willing and curious, students are poised to move beyond hardened facts already drawn and established. Adorno writes:

The naiveté of the student, to whom the difficult and formidable seems good enough, is wiser than the adult pedantry that admonishes thought with a threatening finger to understand the simple before risking that complexity which alone entices it. Such a postponement of knowledge only prevents knowledge. (162)

Adorno here contends that the naiveté of the student uniquely prepares her to experience thought differently and to enact a methodology more in tune with the essay's impetus. Indeed, this naiveté

contributes a certain sensible knowledge that those of us who might hesitate to attempt thought – postponing knowledge – until we are certain that we have ascertained both the simple and the complex.²⁰

Adorno's disavowal of this (simple to the complex) procedure will be important to my argument in several ways throughout this dissertation. Most broadly, I argue that since the essay is committed to beginning with the difficult, the essay's methodology provides a way for writers to engage in learning that goes beyond the repetition and reification of knowledge. Risking such complexity of thought can be intimidating, but such risks pay off in the intellectual benefits achieved by learning to think for oneself. As I will show shortly, the engagement of difficulty is a central praxis of my classroom. Moreover, in rejecting the necessity of moving from the simple to the complex, Adorno also rejects, it seems to me, a parallel claim this dissertation also works against: the argument that students must be able to write successfully in one genre or discourse (such as academic discourse) before they are "able" or ready to negotiate multiple discourses or genres. The argument of this dissertation is quite the opposite. I contend that working with difficult essays, as well as navigating the multiple genres of hybrid essays in particular, foregrounds the uses, limits, and differences between discourses – foregrounding, in fact discourses *as* discourses. Developing such awareness, I contend, therefore allows students to more readily learn to write in multiple ways, as well as to move between genres and discourses, for different purposes and effects.

With this "difficult and formidable" pedagogy in mind, I'll say now just a few things about the hermeneutics important to Adorno's theory of the essay. Like the writer of the essay who practices critical thought, the reader, too, becomes a central part of the "arena of intellectual experience" according to Adorno (161). More than simply receiving ideas or information, the reader is essential to the process of meaning-making. At key moments in his essay, Adorno stresses this crucial relationship between reader and text, a relationship that is much more than exegetical. First, Adorno negates charges of the essay as a form which "overinterprets," claiming that such a charge assumes that meaning must be made by either a retreat to "individual psychological reactions" or as "nothing more than unwrapping what the

²⁰ The review of literature in most published articles, and indeed dissertations, is a ready example of this process.

author wanted to say” (152). Instead of reactive response or interpretation grounded in authorial intention, Adorno insists on the interpretive possibility enacted between reader and text.

Since Adorno’s reader does not merely decode either singular, static meaning or the intentions of a distant author, Adorno positions the reader in a central position hermeneutically speaking. For Adorno, the work of interpretation is not uni-directional, but instead, dialogic:

Nothing can be interpreted out of a work without at the same time being interpreted into it. The criteria of this process are the compatibility of the interpretation with the text and with itself and its power to release the object’s expression in the unity of its elements.
(153)

Here Adorno elaborates the inter-responsibility of interpreter and interpretation to the text and to itself. Since students may be more willing to confront the difficult (as has, in my experience, been the case with some encouragement), they are poised to do important interpretive work as readers.

The increased dialogism between all actors within a hermeneutic situation that Adorno stresses helps to establish an intellectual community which, via the essay, can “push thought further” instead of relying on perceived divisions or accepted understandings. Such negations of binary divisions are clearly supported within the field of hermeneutics, broadly speaking. Just as hermeneutics resists the notion of a subject/object split, it also negates the form/content split. With neither form nor content perceived as the “object,” we can shift our understanding of texts toward a more dialogic understanding in which the essay puts a question to its author, a question which hermeneutics scholar Richard Palmer describes as “the question that called it [the writing] into being” (240). The essay enacts a hermeneutical method grounded in dialogic and critical interpretation – acts that occur for both reader and writer. It is this epistemology – posed in an intellectual arena and activated by the person most likely to embrace difficulty as both a reader and a writer: the student – that shapes the essay.

1.2.3 The Essay and its Challenges – Stylistic and Otherwise

Yet despite the essayistic impetus I have been describing, and despite the essay's existence as the most open and anti-systematic of forms, Adorno admits that the essay's refusal of totality makes it vulnerable. Although the essay's lack of edifice and its reliance on interactive definition and method allows it to remain radically open so that it may "drive beyond itself" and thus become "true progress," Adorno notes that the essay must "pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience by [its]... lack of security." Open to misinterpretation, impatience, and general disinterest, the essay's lack of linear structure can prove challenging for readers. This is a challenge that the essay continues to face both within and outside of the academy today, a challenge which is no doubt related to the small number of essays published and read each year as compared to other literary genres and a challenge to which those who teach essays must certainly attend.

The essay is not unaware of these dangers; it recognizes its own difficulties and seeks to labor "emphatically on the form of its presentation" in an attempt to maintain some kind of coherence even in the face of its self-disruptive tendencies (165). This emphatic labor makes visible the essay's "excess of intention" – its attempts to hold itself together while still allowing fluidity, fragmentation, and exploration. This emphatic labor thus, in turn, impacts the style of the essay. Since Adorno allows for more stylistic freedom in the essay he also consequently admits more room for stylistic inconsistency.

In some ways, though, the unstable style of the essay – a style in danger of losing readers – supports greater reflexivity and greater innovation. Always careful about how it puts words to use, the essay "takes the matter of presentation more seriously than do those procedures that separate out method from material and are indifferent to the way they represent their objectified contents...The how of expression should rescue, in precision, what the refusal to outline sacrifices..." (160). Since method and material are dialectically intertwined, and since both are constantly subjected to the critical gaze of the essay, Adorno contends that the style of the essay can make up for the essay's resistance to logical, conventional development.

Moreover, because the essay is so cognizant and invested in its style – it labors “emphatically” on its presentation – it refuses to elide its own procedures of thought, its acts of juxtaposition and, indeed, its own making. This is particularly the case with the hybrid essays this project explores. Adorno writes “the object of the essay is the new as something genuinely new, as something not translatable back into the staleness of already existing forms” (169). Each essay takes as its task the development of a style appropriate to its arena of thought and a form that makes visible its own construction; as I show below, this construction is often even more apparent with hybrid essays through the juxtaposition of multiple genres, discourses, and even visual elements.

As I mentioned above, the instability of the essay demands an awareness on behalf of those that do take up the form. Essay writers must be aware of the essay’s liabilities; this is particularly important for writers whose already marginal positions might amplify such liabilities. Contemporary German theorist Peter Uwe Hohendahl pursues this connection in his 1997 article “The Scholar, the Intellectual, and the Essay,” in which he argues, like Adorno, that the intellectual is defined precisely by the essay. Hohendahl directly considers the essay’s style and method in his suggestion that this same intellectual “defined by” the essay is also “exposed to error as part of the learning process” implicit in the essay (225). Although such error can be productively explored by the essay, the instability I’ve described above extends, according to Hohendahl, from the essay to the essay-writer thus increasing the chances for marginalization. Intellectuals and students alike who seek the benefits the essay affords must likewise recognize this danger. As teachers and advocates for our students, we must be acutely aware of and conversant about the risks as essays authored by students circulate in the spaces outside our classrooms. These risks might include misinterpretation, charges of irrelevancy, impatience with the essay’s indirect method, and attempts to transform the essay into more direct, and thus more consumable, prose.

Is the essay worth such risks? I hope I have already made visible the ways that the essay’s powerful intellectual arena, commitment to complex thought and reflexivity, and privileging of the student are worth our attention. Hohendahl’s assertion is perhaps more polemic. He argues that the essay is vitally necessary at this point in time, writing that “the structure of the essay becomes the only viable

strategy of the intellectual: Subversion replaces opposition; the act of writing (as a performance) replaces social praxis” (225). Here Hohendahl concurs with Adorno’s assertion that within a bureaucratic and administrative society the intellectual’s role must be radically redefined. The solution – by Hohendahl’s account – is through the act of writing and thinking in essays. If this is indeed the case, we must consistently attend to ways that essayists can exist – can work productively – both within and outside (and between) the academy and the public sphere.²¹ As compositionists attendant to the circulation of writing and ideas in the world, we are able to do this work. Although Hohendahl’s scholarship concerning public intellectualism situates itself primarily in the German context, recent conversations within our field that consider the gap between the spheres of the American academy and public/community can find fruitful avenues here to theorize the role of the intellectual and the role of the student-writer as productive actors in intellectual engagement. Adding an evaluation of the essay and its possibilities to the voices already engaged in theories of writing in the public sphere is one provocative direction to pursue.²²

For these scholars, then – and for me – the potential dangers caused by the essay’s instability are greatly outweighed by its benefits. Moreover, even the effects of instability cannot always be understood as negative – instability can be productive for author, text, and reader.²³ Just as the essay opens itself to possibility through sacrificing security, the reader can be drawn more fully into the essay’s meaning-making activity via the (readable) context that the essay creates for her. For Adorno the promise of the intellect is intimately bound to the promise, and material constraints, of the essay’s form, since essays shape and re-shape what it is possible to know and think. Casting a skeptical eye upon accepted ways of

²¹ Like Adorno, Hohendahl contends that it is the essay’s ability to enact a critical distance and reflexivity that allows it to be a tool for ideological critique. As the author of the essay, the intellectual also assumes this critical and proactive position. However for Hohendahl’s German context, this is a position within the literary and broadly-construed public sphere – not the academy (221).

²² For work on the connections and issues concerning writing for the public(s), see especially Ellen Cushman (1999), Amy Goodburn (2001; 2004), Peter Mortensen (1998), and Susan Wells (1996).

²³ The instability that Adorno references can be understood as a connection to claims of irrelevance that the essay faces both within and outside of the academy. Adorno seems to imagine a reader immanently invested in working toward meaning via the context the essay provides. It is thus not that the essay is unreadable, but that it carries a particular impertinence that may necessitate a sympathetic reader. As such, those writing essays – or teaching them – may need to understand the precariousness of the form, the extent to which the lack of edifying structure may render the essay illegible, and the ways in which it thus may be (mis)interpreted by larger, perhaps decontextualized, audiences in addition to understanding – and championing – the possibilities the essay generates.

thinking, “the law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy...By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy’s secret purpose to keep invisible” (171). The essay is therefore radically poised to expose the contingencies and divisions that persist in the world so that we may more fully engage them, think through them, and begin to understand.

And if the essay is the very thing that constitutes a productive intellectual activity, then composition – as the discipline particularly invested in both theorizing and practicing essay writing – is also radically poised. Moreover, since student-writers are the most prolific practitioners of the essay, the formulation I’ve outlined above positions them as engaged in the most essential intellectual activity within (and perhaps outside of) the academy. The composition classroom can thus serve as an intellectual arena of its own – a place where the productive aspects of the essay can be realized, a place to further consider the ways that the essay’s instability and openness can be exploited for particular purposes, a place where students can encounter the risks the essay allows them to take and reflect on how these risks might be read (both positively and, perhaps, negatively) by their audiences. Within an increasingly reified and corporatized academy, the intellectual, the essay, and the student-writer create a nexus of relationships and opportunities for engaging in intellectual activity. Fostering and enhancing these intellectual arenas is precisely the pressing work to which composition must attend.

1.2.4 Difficulty as Epistemology

If we believe in the method of intellectual collaboration and reflection the essay affords, particular challenges arise as we try to foster such experiences in the classroom. Working with the essay is no easy task, as Adorno and many teachers might note. And even though Adorno privileges the student as the reader most likely to engage the essay’s difficulty – since the “difficult and formidable” seems “good enough” for the student – such encouragement does little to assist the student or other readers and writers of essays as they struggle with the essay’s rich, yet challenging, terrain.

Theorist Mariolina Salvatori, in her article “Conversations with Texts: Reading in the Teaching of Composition,” explores engagement with difficulty as both an interpretative approach and as a way of writing. Salvatori writes that working with difficulty can allow readers and writers to move “from judging a difficulty as a reader’s inability to understand a text to discerning in it a reader’s incipient awareness of the particular ‘demands’ imposed by the language/structure/style/content of a text” (Salvatori, 450). Such recognition allows readers to change their relationship to difficulty from feeling inadequate to feeling as though they can productively work through challenging texts. New texts make certain demands of readers; yet often readers can use what they already know in order to figure out how the text asks them read, or to suggest different readings that might be supported by the text. As Salvatori notes, this model of difficulty works to counter certain assumptions of educational systems: first, that students (particularly gifted students, or those who consistently perform well) do not experience difficulty and second, that teachers “solve” difficulty “for” students, especially by providing a singular notion of “correct” answers.²⁴

A pedagogy grounded in the productivity of engaging difficulty in the spirit of both Salvatori and Adorno might begin, then, with a preliminary methodology that helps students encounter and grapple with difficult moments in texts. As one example among many possible practices, I ask students to use a writing prompt in order to negotiate, attempt understanding, and think reflexively about those textual moments which prove difficult for them. The writing prompt I offer asks students to:

1. Identify a specific moment where they feel challenged, unsure, skeptical, or out of place, and to consider why that feature of the text might be proving difficult for them.
2. Next, in writing, begin to generate hypotheses for understanding that textual moment, making use of concrete features of the text to assist them.
3. Once they’ve produced some initial possibilities, I ask them to substantiate which interpretation seems most plausible and to thus make connections to the larger project of the entire text. Here, students practice textual interpretation and garnering support for their

²⁴ See also James Slevin’s argument for difficulty as difference instead of as lack in the Prologue and Chapter Two of *Introducing English*.

readings, as well as engaging hermeneutically how certain aspects of the text contribute to the understanding of the text in its entirety.

4. Finally, I ask students to reflect on whether the close work they've done with one difficult moment allows anything to shift for them in terms of broader understandings.

As students' capacity to struggle with difficulty grows, I ask them to move to a meta-cognitive level and think about why they find certain textual passages difficult throughout the semester. This move is further reinforced at the end of the semester. At this point, students are asked to write a reflexive essay about the difficulty papers they've written throughout the term (usually about seven or so), in which they describe and consider what they've noticed about their own reading, writing, and interpretative practices.²⁵ This end-of-term essay allows students to assess, speculate, and suggest reflections about engaging difficulty and their own intellectual investments and development.

Working intimately with difficulty in essays in ways such as this can thus become a way for all readers to focus on texts in a new way. By looking for places where we had trouble, that we found confusing, or that just seemed not quite right, we can engage these complexities instead of skipping over them or asking someone else for a single "right answer." Re-positioning difficulty as a fruitful place for discovery instead of as a place of lack or failure is the necessary first step of this process. This re-positioning of difficulty also capitalizes on the naiveté of the student by extending a similar willing and curious naiveté to all readers so that they might be open to engaging difficulty. The moments within essays that readers struggle with can be productively recognized as a marker of pre-understandings or initial attempts to move toward understanding. This approach also asks students (and teachers) to take note of the assumptions, expectations, and perhaps taken-for-granted ways we might approach both reading and writing through making our "difficulties" visible. In these ways, difficulties in reading and

²⁵ The methodologies I encourage my students to use, of course, could be charged with being reductive in that they suggest a particular way to go about the writing task. However, in that the pedagogies of difficulty and dialogue I've suggested ask students to begin with their own concerns, their own interpretations – what they notice about the text and are interested in – I have worked to build in an anti-systematic epistemology even within the assignment. Additionally, our conversations over the course of the semester work to position this type of writing within a range of discursive and epistemological possibilities, as well as discussing how these possibilities are differently situated and activated within the academy.

writing can be thought of as productive moments that all readers and writers share, and thus as moments that bring readers and writers into a closer relationship.

More than valuing difficulty in and of itself, refocusing our attention on textual difficulties – in the essays we both read and write – offers a radical way to reconfigure the uses of writing within in the university.²⁶ Conceptualizing intellectual activity as those acts which seek to understand and engage difficulty shifts value away from “success” and toward those endeavors which ask students to stretch and question themselves and their abilities. Working to build the intellectual arenas that bring readers and writers, acts of reading and writing, and students and critics together, the essay provides an ideal site to begin this renewed intellectual mission.

I will return to this intellectual arena at the end of the next section via a vis examples of student writing. First, however, I consider another figure who assists me in recuperating the essay as an intellectual tool: M.M. Bakhtin. Bakhtin is important to this dissertation as one theorist who has already been picked up by composition due to his focus on dialogic interaction in writing, a phrase I have already deployed several times in this project. Although Bakhtin’s scholarship has typically been used within the field of composition to distinguish between academic and other discourses (what he calls authoritative versus internally persuasive discourse), Bakhtin’s focus on dialogism, combined with his attention to the “prose writer” and the “heteroglossia” of language, can be aptly put to use in terms of the essay writing I have been describing. Bakhtin thus helps me to transition from Adorno’s theory of the essay as an intellectual arena, broadly speaking, to the specific dialogic and heteroglot hybrid essays that students read and write in writing courses.

²⁶ The compelling anthology *Just Being Difficult?: Academic Writing in the Public Arena* explores recent debates levied against academics who have been read in the wider sphere as being difficult (or embracing difficulty) for “difficulty’s sake.” Moreover, several of the essays collected in this volume explore the connections between difficulty and writing, especially the “bad writing” seen as tied to difficulty. See also essays in the volume by Michael Warner, Robert Kaufman, and Judith Butler each of whom extends the critical dialogue concerning Adorno’s theories of difficulty and aesthetics.

1.3 GENRE AND BAKHTIN

In the previous section, I explored Adorno's emphasis on essays as intellectual arenas and, in particular, the reader of essays within this dialogic realm. Indeed, this focus on the reader – and on the capacities of the student-reader especially – is a particular strength of Adorno's work. The focus on readers' relationships to the essay has likewise been the focus of much of genre theory. Since genre theory seeks to distinguish literary forms from one another, outlining and assessing their conventions, (reader) expectations, and degree of participation within generic guidelines, the reader constitutes the primary apprehender of genre. Current theories of genre, particularly those that focus on genre across media forms, affirm this description of genre theory, yet emphasize that genre perpetuates an economy of both "expectation and competency" (Dowd et al, 7). Although these horizons of expectancy and competency apply generally to a given reader navigating and interacting with the texts and his or her impressions of that text given their expectations, both expectation and competency also apply to a writer's composition within a particular genre.

How has contemporary genre theory positioned the essay and its readers and writers within its horizons? First, from a literary studies perspective are the theories of the essay as non-genre which attempt to situate the essay as a form outside the typical boundaries of genre conventions (Culler; Snyder). Jonathan Culler, for example, argues that since genre is not a series of taxonomies but a series of expectations carried by readers, genre should be properly understood as an attempt by readers to make sense of unintelligible texts along the lines of intelligence available and familiar to them. This is what Culler describes as "the astonishing human capacity to recuperate the deviant, to invent new conventions and functions so as to overcome that which resists our efforts" (262). Since readers are rewarded for these efforts by "texts which fall at the interstices of genres [and which] enable us to read ourselves in the limits of our understanding," Culler's ultimate conclusion is that "*non-genre literature* is not just a residue but central to the contemporary experience of literature" (262, original emphasis). Scholarship along these lines seeks to address Culler's driving question: "Why are our most crucial and tantalizing

experiences of literature located at the interstices of genres, in this region of *non-genre literature*?” (258, original emphasis).

In conversation with this question are theories of postmodern literary genre. Fredric Jameson, for example, in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, provides a historical and cultural theory of postmodernism as the “depthlessness” and “lack of historicity” evident in a culture more grounded in pastiche, fragmentation, and simulacra. Jean-Francois Lyotard’s definition extends back to cultural forms more directly; he defines the postmodern as that which “puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms...that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable” (81). By “good forms” I take Lyotard to be referring to those forms he associates with modernist writing – forms which are both easily recognizable and consistent and thus provide the reader “solace and pleasure” (81). Lyotard goes on to note that it is the essay (and not the modernist fragment) which is characteristically postmodern; the hybrid essay, I would contend, emphasizes Lyotard’s definition of a postmodern form in search of a new presentation attempting to convey elements of the “unrepresentable.”²⁷ These literary theoretical understandings of non-genre and postmodern genre provide the broad ground for theories of the essay.²⁸

The significant body of work on genre within the field of composition – work which has put pressure on the ways we understand the writer’s relationship to genre, the ideological nature of genre, and the shifting nature of genre in response to burgeoning demands created by new technologies and forms of writing – constitutes the second important context for this project. Influenced especially by scholarship beginning from and in conversation with Carolyn R. Miller’s “Genre as Social Action,” recent genre theory within composition has questioned genre as merely a classifying system which treats texts as

²⁷ In making this statement, Lyotard writes that “the essay (Montaigne) is postmodern.” Pointing explicitly back to Montaigne allows a similar pointing back to other texts which are postmodern in this way, such as *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*, for example. Critics Marjorie Perloff and Rosemary Colie, among others, have also written at length about the connections between postmodern writing and pre-modern literary texts.

²⁸ See Patricia Sullivan’s dissertation, *Avant-garde composition: Pedagogies of Experimental Writing* (2002), for more on the connections between experimental writing in composition as parallel to the goals of the avant-garde.

stable, unified entities by advancing the idea of genre as rhetorical action driven by socialized conventions. In responding to this new direction in genre studies, Peter Vandenberg argues that such a social turn is particularly useful to composition studies as the field seeks to “expand its interest beyond form and the individual writer’s processes...[initiating a] transition from form to action” (533, 537).

Arguing that genre is socially situated and driven, these new genre theories arose to challenge more textually focused studies on form and creative focuses on process. Expanding out to give attention to workplace and professional writing, as well as writing in the disciplines, current genre theory has both practical and political motives in defining genre as social and the access to genre as ideological and empowering. Current genre theory now emphasizes the range of movement, flexibility, and play within genres and often takes up the position that literature, itself, has always been cross-generic (D. Freedman, 4). And, in conversation with arguments recasting genre as a way to “act effectively on a situation through a text” recent contributions have focused on ideological structures and power relations (A. Freedman, 11). Within these theories, genre can be defined as an act of both “empowerment and potential disempowerment,” particularly if “enculturation within a genre system turns ways of writing into ways of looking, one’s degraded place in relations of power can seem fixed, natural, and even necessary” (Holdstein, 278; Vandenberg, 543).

This broadening of scholarship on genre has resulted in a consistent body of work that privileges the complex nexus of components that constitute genre. Two current and influential books on genre continue this trend. Amy Devitt, in *Writing Genres*, proposes “that genre be seen not as a response to recurring situation but as a nexus between an individual’s actions and a socially defined context...genre exists through people’s individual rhetorical actions at the nexus of the contexts of situation, culture, and genres” (31). In his text *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Anis Bawarshi advances a similar cultural approach, yet interjects the role of the writer – herself produced and written by the genres she writes in – more forcefully into the argument. This juncture of forces that constitute genre is pursued in most current collections on genre (such as *Genre Across the Curriculum* and *ALT DIS*) which present the view that genre can productively serve as a locus for discussions about reading and writing pedagogy as long as

they are grounded in local practices and as long as they are tied, in some way, to how writing is useful in larger social environments (the university, the public, the personal life of a citizen). Finally, other theorists extend genre to our contemporary, technological moment in order to tackle the subject of genre. In their Bakhtinian-styled, now canonical essay “Postings on a Genre of Email,” Spooner and Yancey write that the “essay genre becomes a place where genre itself is the topic of inquiry, even of dispute” (254). Spooner and Yancey not only take up the essay in their research (constructing a hybrid essay of sorts, as well) but consider a question I will take up in the later chapters of this book: to what extent do new media constitute, shift, or make visible changing genres and practices?²⁹

Turning to M.M. Bakhtin – as Spooner and Yancey do and as many theorists in composition have done – makes sense. Bakhtin serves as a useful bridge between literary and composition theory, as his ideas are frequently used in both. Given that Bakhtin is among the scholars most attentive to discourse and the social interaction of how discourses mix in the world and in texts, Bakhtin’s work on genre, style, and language’s social nature provides an excellent accompaniment to Adorno’s more specific theories concerning the essay. Although more research needs to be done in thinking about Bakhtin’s speaking-oriented theories and unpacking the complexities that shifting his orientation to writing might elicit, Bakhtin is suggestive for the above concerns I’ve listed: the writer and the reader in conversation, the ideological and socially situated nature of language, and discourses in dialogue in an increasingly diverse discursive world.³⁰ Bakhtin is also remarkable for his attention to and valuation of the “prose writer” – a figure who is especially attuned to the social and dynamic character of language.

Bakhtin’s focus is, broadly speaking, the social character and dynamic of language (he is not writing directly about education, for example, despite his many years teaching at the Moravian

²⁹ See also the same May 1996 issue of *CCC* for a special Interchanges section concerning technology and genre that responds to this article and the questions it raises. Carolyn R. Miller’s response – “This is Not an Essay” – is particularly interesting in that she concludes that continuing to attend to genre helps us to “problematize what students write and why” while considering genre in relationship to technological developments “may help us finally understand students as rhetors, communicators for whom genres are not academic forms but effective social instruments” (288).

³⁰ Too large to consider here, the question of Bakhtin’s reliance on speech as the dominant area of communication under investigation – for example, it is the “speaking person and his discourse” which constitutes the “fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel” – remains to be more fully explored by others working on Bakhtin, particularly those interested in his later work on speech genres (332).

Pedagogical School where Bakhtin historian Michael Holquist claims that he “influenced generations of young people who went out to teach”) (Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, xxv). Bakhtin’s work, however, has been picked up across fields: literary theory, linguistics and the philosophy of language, and social theory broadly considered. Recently, his work has become increasingly important for educators, particularly composition and rhetoric scholars. Bakhtin has allowed these theorists to reconfigure both approaches to genre and discourse as well as particular classroom practices. A brief survey of current uses of Bakhtin within composition demonstrates this trend. Important work has been done to extend Bakhtin’s work to: responding to student writing (Goleman; Recchio; Ritchie; Welsh), genre studies (Comprone; Cross; Kent), disciplinary conflicts and possible solutions (Bialostosky; Cooper), pedagogy (Farmer; Halasek), and teaching for new populations and in new (often technological) circumstances (Kalman; Mahiri; Valdés). His work has been widely cited (including epigraphically and somewhat tangentially) and his ideas of the carnival and the carnivalesque, the utterance, polyphony, the chronotope, the superaddressee, authoritative and internally persuasive discourses, heteroglossia, and dialogism are now in wide circulation. The numerous and diverse ways Bakhtin’s work has been used thus illustrates the productive density and broadly applicable theories of language he offers.

I offer my contribution to this canon by focusing particularly on the figure Bakhtin names as the “prose writer” and the last two ideas I’ve named above: heteroglossia and dialogism. I argue that Bakhtin is useful to both our understanding of the essay as a particularly dialogic form (and thus one appropriate to the goals of writing education) as well as to our understanding of the heteroglot nature of hybrid essays. Thus, for my purposes Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism and heteroglossia provide both a description of the remarkable value of hybrid essays as well as a model for a classroom praxis constructed with these aims in mind. This is to also say that the construction of the writing classroom as an intellectual arena based on dialogue and the exploration of the heteroglossia that shapes our world and discourses would benefit from significant attention to essays, particularly hybrid essays. Since hybrid essays foreground heteroglot discourses in dialogic interaction with one another, they make visible – and thus available for discussion – the way discourses circulate, bump against one another, and both relay and

shape thought. Working with hybrid essays as part of a curriculum thus supports the elements of dialogic exchange and reflexivity inherent to the intellectual arena I've been describing. Understanding the hybrid essay through the lens of Bakhtin allows a way for us to bring these essays to schools – as both a reading and writing exercise – that in turn encourages many of the things we now value in conversation with Bakhtin: dialogue between students, texts, and ideas; attention to genre and style; and awareness of the ways that discourse shapes our world and our thought.

In order to focus my investigation in relation to Bakhtin's significant body of work, I will primarily deal with Bakhtin's dense essay "Discourse in the Novel," fleshing out the ways that Bakhtin sees multiple discourses interacting within a single textual form.³¹ I begin from a position which argues that if Bakhtin uses his essay "Discourse in the Novel" to illustrate and theorize novelistic discourse as "the best transcription of language," my exploration of the essay details, in similar fashion, the transcription the essay makes: a transcription not only of the dialogic interaction of languages, but the dialogic interaction of ideas at a given historical moment.³² In situating the essay as a transcription of the languages and ideas of a moment, my work makes a parallel, if more narrowly focused, move to the one Bakhtin makes in relating the novel's discourse to the material reality of an age or epoch. Since the essay typically deploys its languages in service of a particular question – a question which can be explored in

³¹ Such a selection is necessary due to the fact that Bakhtin's corpus of work is large, dense, and often difficult, not to mention that his theories shift somewhat between earlier and later works. The goal of such a selection is not, as Helen Rothschild Ewald points out, to make Bakhtin "handy" or circumscribed to my particular project, a trend sometimes perceived as common in the field of Composition. It is also not my intention to represent or resolve the many accents present across Bakhtin's work, accents which scholars such as Michael Bernard-Donals contend are diverse and in some ways fundamentally irreconcilable. Instead, I hope the summary of several key commitments Bakhtin makes in dialogue with the work I pursue here reflects Bakhtin's larger body of important and rich thought.

³² As I've been using the words dialogue and dialogic throughout this chapter, I will pause here to define them more specifically, particularly as the notion of dialogue suggests the spirit of much of Bakhtin's theory. Bakhtin scholar Frank Farmer details the three levels on which Bakhtin's theories of dialogue function; for me, this richness is part of what I (and others, I might guess) find attractive and productive. First, for Bakhtin, dialogue is *ontological*. Being is being in dialogue, and thus meaning is made only in and through dialogue with others and with language. Second, dialogue is *epistemological*. It suggests both the ways in which there is neither an outside nor an inside, and the ways, thus, that no singular truth or way of knowing exists. In a similar way, perhaps, to Agamben's notion of "medio," for Bakhtin truth resides in the dialogue – that is, "in between." Third, dialogue is *metalinguistic*. In such ideas as the utterance and speech genres, Bakhtin shifts the level of study from (what may be) the static sentence/paragraph/form of writing to language in use and constantly in motion between past and future, speaker and listener, and the differently inflected utterances that make up these systems. It is within the metalinguistic level that the ability to both represent and to talk about other discourse (as well as systems of discourse) emerges.

significant complexity in a more limited space than the novel – focusing inquiry on the more limited interaction constructed between an essay and its current moment provides a microcosmic site where Bakhtin’s theories play out.³³ As I unpack Bakhtin’s theories of discourse, heteroglossia, dialogism, and style in the coming pages I will thus illustrate the similarities the essay bears to Bakhtin’s definition of the novel: the essay, especially the hybrid essay, is also “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (262). The result is my contention that the essay, like Bakhtin’s novel, achieves a highly dialogic and productively stylistic ordering of discourses emerging from its surrounding socio-cultural moment and, moreover, that reading the essay in this way reframes the way we read student-writing.

1.3.1 Combining Words and Worlds: Bakhtin’s Discursive Hybridization

Bakhtin usefully widens the scope of the arguments about genre I’ve summarized above by emphasizing the social nature of language. He writes that, “The separation of style and language from the question of genre has been largely responsible for a situation in which only individual and period-bound overtones of a style are the privileged subjects of study, while its basic social tone is ignored” (259). Such a decontextualized and atomistic approach impoverishes both the study of genre and the study of stylistics. It is therefore Bakhtin’s argument that novelistic discourse and the novel as a genre make visible the inadequacy of such a separation; accordingly, the novel serves as an “acid test” for the study of genre and

³³ Bakhtin seems to allow for other prosaic forms to fulfill similar projects as the novel when he writes of the dilemma facing stylistics and discourse: “either to acknowledge the novel (and consequently all artistic prose tending in that direction) an unartistic or quasi-artistic genre, or to radically reconsider that conception of poetic discourse in which traditional stylistics is grounded and which determines all its categories” (267). Graham Good makes this connection more forcefully in citing another of Bakhtin’s definitions of the novel as “whatever form of expression within a given literary system reveals the limits of that system as inadequate, imposed or arbitrary” (Holquist and Clark, 276 cited in Good, 1).

stylistics since it necessitates an integrated approach between the study of genre, style, and the social nature of language.³⁴

Like the novel, the essay has historically fallen prey to analyses which have substituted the writer's individual language for the style of the work as a whole. Bakhtin contends that "Such substitution inevitably leads to the selection from the novel of only those elements that can be fitted within the frame of a single language system and that express, directly and without mediation, an authorial individuality in language" (265). Such approaches are driven by two presumptions: "on the one hand a unity of language (in the sense of a system of general normative forms) and on the other hand the unity of an individual person realizing himself in this language" (264).³⁵ The result of this mistaken substitution is an elevated sense of the author's language while "heteroglot, multi-voiced, multi-styled and often multi-linguaged elements remain outside the boundaries of such a study" (265). The presumption of unity in both language itself and unity within the authorial individual, combined with the inability to deal with the most complex linguistic aspects of texts, clearly proves problematic for assessing the intricate workings of language in the essay broadly speaking, as well as for hybrid essays in particular.

For my purposes, then, Bakhtin's focus on the prose writer is useful in terms of assessing the particular work that essays allow. Bakhtin values the prose writer in that she is able to counter these presumptions of unity by her embrace of the social character of language. Unlike the poet, the prose writer feels "cramped" when confined to a singular language: "the idea of a singular language (a sacrosanct, unconditional language) is foreign to prose, prosaic consciousness must orchestrate its *own* –

³⁴ To clarify the difference of the novel as a genre, Bakhtin considers the singular and monolithic genre of poetry. Poetic discourse, he argues, invents its own language and unifies its discourse internally within that language. The result of this singularity is poetry's inability to doubt – an epistemological state crucial to prose writing. Whereas poetry perceives other languages as "objects that are in no way its equal," both the novel and the essay recognize the purchase to be gained by surveying and incorporating languages outside its disciplinary borders (288).

³⁵ Bakhtin moreover contends that such singularly stylistic approaches are driven by the desire to find "in the stylistic phenomenon a direct and unmediated expression of authorial individuality" (267). Given our contemporary, post-modern moment and given (one of) the express purposes of the hybrid essay as complicating a sense of unmediated reality and subjectivity, such a system of stylistics offers little to a recuperated sense of the essay which confronts the world in ways that extend beyond the author's individual subjectivity.

even though unconditional – semantic intentions” (324, original emphasis). Bakhtin puts the case even more polemically in comparing the intentions and affects of this prosaic consciousness:

The prose writer does not purge words of intentions and tones that are alien to him, he does not destroy the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words, he does not eliminate those language characterizations and speech mannerisms (potential narrator-personalities) glimmering behind the words and forms, each at a different distance from the ultimate semantic nucleus of his work, that is, the center of his own personal intentions. (298)

In this passage, Bakhtin makes clear that the prose writer allows others’ utterances replete with others’ intentions and accents to exist alongside the prose writer’s own intentions. Her method of composition is not one centered on the appropriation and modification of the discourse of others. Instead, she allows her own position to refract the heteroglossia that occupy her text. Bakhtin’s definition of heteroglossia as “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” supplements this description of the prose writer’s use of heteroglot language (324). Indeed, this metaphor of refraction is a central intellectual principle for Bakhtin, for it allows him to describe the interaction of utterances and the accents and connections they invariably carry.

One strategy that accomplishes such refraction is hybridization, which Bakhtin defines as “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, *an encounter*, within the arena of an utterance between two different linguistic consciousnesses” (358, my emphasis). In such an encounter, the two languages are engaged yet remain distinctly differentiated. This effect is conscious, Bakhtin contends, and can be read as an artistic device. What is remarkable and crucial about such textual hybridization is not the mixing of languages per se, but the “*collision* between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms...[and which are] set against each other dialogically” (360, original emphasis).³⁶ In fact, such a collision is almost an ethical imperative for Bakhtin. One of his

³⁶ Bakhtin differentiates between these intentional hybrids and what he calls “historical, organic hybrids.” Such organic hybrids, in that they are not conscious, are not dialogical in the way of intentional hybrids; they often

primary contentions in terms of representing the heteroglossia of language is the claim that “it is impossible to represent an alien ideological world adequately without first permitting it to sound, without having first revealed the special discourse peculiar to it” (335). Here, the inclusion of alien discourse and its particular soundings must precede an examination of a separate ideological world or stance. To adequately represent and consider the heteroglossia of language, prose must work in a refracted way; prose must give alien discourses their due by including their voices and intonations.

Another “basic and fundamental” way to structure and support heteroglossia is through the use of incorporated genres. Bakhtin notes that incorporated genres can range from the artistic (such as poems, short stories, or dramatic scenes) to the extra-artistic (religious, rhetorical, scholarly, everyday, etc.) (320).³⁷ In each instance, the incorporated genres contribute “their own languages” to the prose, “and therefore stratify the linguistic unity...and further intensify its speech diversity in fresh ways” (321). In addition to the discourse of the writer refracting the incorporated genres, these genres also exert a refracting pressure on the writer’s discourse. The result is a dialogic interaction between discourses that can increase the spectrum of speech diversity.

“remain mute and opaque” since the two linguistic worlds are bound up in one another. Despite their lack of consciousness, however, Bakhtin recognizes the way that such hybrids have been “profoundly productive historically” in that they are “pregnant with potential for new world views, with new “internal forms” for perceiving the world in words” (360). This distinction is helpful in acknowledging the ways that textual hybrids can be either (or both) artistically conscious and/or unconsciously combining linguistic forms and innovating new ways of understanding and writing the world.

³⁷ Bakhtin’s relationship to rhetoric, broadly speaking, and his relationship to rhetoric as it relates to and differs from poetics, is complex and mixed. Although he contends that “rhetorical forms for understanding the novel” are significant, he also argues that novelistic discourse “was never reducible to rhetorical discourse.” Novelistic discourse is “poetic discourse, but one that does not fit within the frame provided by the concept of poetic discourse as it now exists” (269). Although the way Bakhtin describes the utterance as directed toward an answerer and as constructed with that in mind seems a rhetorically-inflected description, at other points in the essay Bakhtin describes rhetoric as lacking a double-voicedness or a key characteristic of dialogic writing that represents two different intentions and thus serves two different speakers at the same time. Although such double-voiced discourse can be present within the rhetorical genres, Bakhtin contends that, since it is subsumed by “the boundaries of a single language system – it is not fertilized by a deep-rooted connection with the forces of historical becoming that serve to stratify language, and therefore rhetorical genres are at best merely a distanced echo of this becoming narrowed down to an individual plane” (325). In some ways then, rhetoric is figured in a similar fashion to poetry – as stylistically reductive and reified. Too fraught to discuss here, Bakhtin’s understanding of rhetoric has been productively explored elsewhere. See especially scholarship by Halasek, Bernard-Donals, Bialostosky, and Zebrowski collected in the *Landmark Essays on Bakhtin* for a discussion and clarification of this debate, Bialostosky’s article “Architectonics, Rhetoric, and Poetics” evaluating Bakhtin’s early work, and Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* which discusses the interaction of these fields from the point of view of composition.

Bakhtin's understanding of genre, heteroglossia, and the need to radically rework stylistics through an increased awareness of language's social embeddedness drives many of his observations and his particular relationship to the ways language works both in the world and in texts. Defining language as a "social phenomenon that is becoming in history, socially stratified and weathered in this process of becoming," Bakhtin views language as radically in motion and constantly shifting (326). Moreover, the heteroglot nature of language provides the opportunity for change beyond the realm of language: "individual wills and minds are submerged in *social* heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it" (326, original emphasis). The diverse social nature of language thus also enacts its influence upon language-users, particularly those language-users open to the dialogue that exists in language collisions. With these central ideas in mind, the following sections take up this series of commitments and explore how Bakhtin's framework sheds light upon the essay, essayistic style, and the implications of students writing essays in dialogic fashion.

1.3.2 On the Boundary of Style: Words and Their Interplay within the Essay

As mentioned above, one of Bakhtin's primary interests is to consider not only the "private craftsmanship" of language that stylistics typically attends to, but the larger, social discourses which also intersect with and inflect the stylistics of a given text. Bakhtin's turn to the novel is in part a turn away from earlier definitions of style – grounded in poetics and the autonomous literary work – and a turn toward the larger discursive world. Indeed, Bakhtin asserts that the new form of the novel made these narrow and isolated systems of style visible through its dialogization.

Style, for Bakhtin, is the "fundamental and creative (triple) relationship of discourse to its object, to the speaker himself, and to another's discourse; style strives organically to assimilate material into language and language into material" (378). By keeping these multiple relationships in play, prose writing illustrates the material nature of language and presents its own discourse for inclusion within the material world. As I've show above, the diversity of speech types and voices present in prosaic writing

necessitate different attempts to describe, account for, and keep in dialogue heteroglot styles. Bakhtin urges a move beyond unitary language – a historically centripetal force – which seeks to overcome heteroglossia by imposing a “correct language,” a singular style, and the accompanying world view such unitary language presents. Instead, Bakhtin advocates a refractive and dialogic style that does justice to the heteroglossia of language: “Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons that would be available to a single language or a single mirror” (415).

Bakhtin’s focus on discursive prose’s multiple horizons helps to construct a productive stylistics not only for prose in general, but for the essay (and the hybrid essay) specifically. This is particularly the case in terms of Bakhtin’s disapproval of stylistic analyses that center on stylistic unity, a familiar position within the history of theories of the essay. Since the essay has often been thought of, and often historically defined by, its single, controlling authorial voice, Bakhtin’s description of style, heteroglossia, and language’s connection to the broader world thus provides a challenge to the notion of a unified and singular language and thus, by extension, to unified academic discourse. Much research in composition has centered on this area of Bakhtin’s work – the differences between internally persuasive discourse (or, “retelling in one’s own words”) and authoritative discourse (Goleman; Halasek; Ritchie).³⁸ Needless to say, Bakhtin’s work seems to anticipate debates concerning the extent to which academic discourse is unified through his discussions not only of these two types of discourse but also in his description of authoritative discourse as a type of “dead quotation” incapable of being dialogic.

Since this trajectory has been among the most widely covered connections between Bakhtin and the field of Composition, I’ll instead briefly suggest another way that Bakhtin’s work can help illuminate the diversity of language present in prosaic writing. In seeking to complicate the presumed stylistic unity

³⁸ Halasek’s *A Pedagogy of Possibility* is particularly helpful and thorough in this regard. See especially her chapter “Redefining the Student Writer” for critiques of the ways student writers are figured in relationship to academic discourse.

of texts (academic discourse serving as a key example) Bakhtin recommends a pedagogically-minded stylistic analysis which proceeds by,

uncovering all the available orchestrating languages in the composition of the novel, grasping the precise degree of distancing that separates each language from its most immediate semantic instantiation in the work as a whole, and the varying angles of refraction of intentions within it, understanding their dialogic interrelationships and – finally – if there *is* direct authorial discourse, determining the heteroglot background outside the work that dialogizes it. (416)

Such analysis relies on the understanding of linguistic utterances as historically grounded and responsive to other utterances within culture. Although Bakhtin's emphasis remains on the novel, his insistence that even authoritative discourse is constructed in dialogue with a heteroglot background is a helpful reminder in terms of understanding academic discourse in a less monolithic, isolated, and stylistically constant way.³⁹

In like fashion, Bakhtin's pedagogical imperative for performing stylistically rich descriptions of texts – including the multiple refractions of discourse and intentions – is particularly useful for grappling with hybrid essays. Indeed, hybrid essays demonstrate – perhaps even more readily than the novel – the dialogue engendered by the integration of language's heteroglossia within a textual space. As I will show in the following chapters, such essays thus present a key site for performing stylistic analysis since such texts, by their very method, consider how languages can change, adapt, and serve as sounding backgrounds for other languages. Such hybrid essays are connected to the social world from which they emerge. In fact, Bakhtin contends that,

³⁹ Despite the ways that Bakhtin's ultimate recommendation presents a tall order pedagogically and critically – Bakhtin argues that a fully successful stylistic analysis should possess a “profound understanding of each language's socio-ideological meaning and an exact knowledge of the social distribution and ordering of all the other ideological voices of the era” – shifting attention to the ways that all texts incorporate multiple discourses and styles and construct themselves in relationship to a dialogizing background is a productive first step (417).

It is precisely in the most sharply heteroglot eras, when the collision and interaction of languages is especially intense and powerful, when heteroglossia washes over literary language from all sides...that aspects of heteroglossia are canonized with great ease and rapidly pass from one language system to another: from everyday life into literary language, from literary language into the language of everyday, from professional jargon into more general use, from one genre to another and so forth (418).

As the following section dealing with Bakhtin concludes, our contemporary moment can be read as such a “heteroglot era.” The hybrid essay, particularly when considered in dialogue with a Bakhtinian framework and the field of composition, provides one fruitful way to imagine such heteroglossia in action and therefore to make clearly visible these heteroglot and dialogic interactions for student interpretation and use.

1.3.3 Shifting Our “Images of Language”: Student-Writing in a Globalized World

The aspects of Bakhtin’s work I’ve enumerated above allow us to reconceptualize student writing no matter the type of text they are asked to construct. First, Bakhtin is extremely helpful in terms of recasting the idea of authorial intention. I’ve already detailed above that, for Bakhtin, intention acts as a series of refractions – of engagements and dialogues with the intonations and accents of others’ discourse – instead of an *a priori* force. To clarify this revised sense of intention, Bakhtin provides a helpful metaphor:

if we imagine the *intention* of such a word, that is its *directionality toward the object*, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colors and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word...the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle. (277, original emphasis)

Imagining student intention in writing this way– and discussing such a metaphor with students – replaces premeditated ideas and language with a sense of a “directionality toward” instead of a linear process of pure translation. Intention imagined and presented this way recognizes the social atmosphere that surrounds both the word and the topic (hero) under discussion; here the word and topic are subject to the “living and unrepeatable play of colors and light” with the diversity of that exchange making “the facets of the image sparkle.”

A second key contribution Bakhtin adds to a recasting of student-writing is found in his commitment to style. The following passage, for example, is useful in imagining the ways that attending to style can help students negotiate the shifting registers of discourse described above:

Style organically contains within itself indices that reach outside itself, a correspondence of its own elements and the elements of an alien context. The internal politics of style (how the elements are put together) is determined by its external politics (its relationship to alien discourse.) The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context. (284)

Here, style becomes an active and mediating force within a text. Style not only contains and unifies – serving as a compositional strategy or centripetal force – but also reaches beyond itself. Style corresponds with discourses and contexts which, even though unknown, are engaged in dialogue. Bakhtin’s sense of the word – like the words of students writing – “lives on the boundary” between the writer’s context and the other contexts that surround and engage those words.

Finally, Bakhtin’s description of the struggles between internally persuasive discourse and the discourse of others provides a helpful lens for understanding student-writing. Like the life of the word “on the boundary” between contexts, Bakhtin writes that the “process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thought, is activated rather late in development... One’s own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible” (345). This description sounds familiar when applied not only to students entering a new world of

academic discourses, but indeed to any writer confronting new areas of thought and representation in language. Such confrontations, however, are essential for Bakhtin, in that our “consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses” which in turn begins to allow thought to “work in an independent, experimenting, and discriminating way” (345).

Such a description aptly fits the essay. The essay, through its method of collecting and juxtaposing “one’s own and another’s discourse...one’s own and another’s thought,” evidences the awakening of discursive life and the experimentation of thought Bakhtin describes. Through this juxtaposition, the essay is committed to Bakhtin’s protocol for allowing the discourse of others to sound. It is this type of interaction the essay plays out as its very method:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group; and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (276)

In the essay, such a dialogic process is played out not only on the semantic level between words but in the text as whole. Such a process of testing and struggle *becomes* the style for particular types of prose writing. Again, Bakhtin’s description of the process enacted by the word aptly describes the method and result of the essay:

The word, breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others, is able, in this dialogized process, to shape its own stylistic profile and tone. (277)

It is through the process of dialogue that the essay constructs a style which, unlike the “style” that Bakhtin finds singular and unresponsive to the heteroglossia of prose, remains multi-vocal.

It is particularly through the use of incorporated genres that the hybrid essay, much like the novel, draws on the diversity of discourse to increase such possibilities. Bakhtin notes that such incorporated genres introduce into the writing,

their own languages, of course, but these languages are primarily significant for making available points of view that are generative in a material sense, since they exist outside literary conventionality and thus have the capacity to broaden the horizon of language available to literature, helping to win for literature new worlds of verbal perception, worlds that had been already sought and partially subdued in other – extraliterary – spheres of linguistic life. (323)

Although including other “available points of view” is the work of the essay broadly speaking, and of the academic essay more specifically, it is the hybrid essay which most importantly “broadens the horizon of language” and wins “new worlds” for literature in its inclusion of incorporated genres and discourses. As I will show in the hybrid essays I examine throughout this dissertation, by engaging in a wide spectrum of discourses – both ones own and others’ – the hybrid essay creates a dialogue between “spheres of linguistic life.”

Thus, although Bakhtin attributes the “acute and intense interaction of another’s word” to Dostoevsky’s novels in particular, I contend that the essay – the hybrid, non-fiction essay (like the essays I explore in chapters three and four) especially – also exemplifies the interaction that Bakhtin describes:

In the first place in his characters’ language there is a profound and unresolved conflict with another’s word on the level of lived experience (“another’s word about me”), on the level of ethical life (another’s judgment, recognition or nonrecognition by another) and finally on the level of ideology (the world views of characters understood as unresolved and unresolved dialogue). (349)

As I will show in chapter three dealing with the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Bakhtin’s combination of lived experience, ethical life, and ideology provides a productive system for reading an author’s interaction with the words of others. Since hybrid essays in general – and Anzaldúa’s work in particular – seek to

explore the interaction of one's words and the words of others as a way to move toward understanding, Bakhtin's inclusion of the ethical and ideological helps us to situate hybrid essays beyond the individual writer, placing them instead at the juncture of the individual subject, the ethical intersection of the subject and her interlocutors, and the ideological force of language drawn from and situated in the material world.

As I've shown in tracing the points above, Bakhtin is concerned with many of the issues I address across the dissertation: understanding the hybrid nature of discourse and of texts such as essays; reconsidering genre, style, and pedagogy with regard to one particular kind of text – the hybrid essay; and identifying innovative compositions that put pressure on standardized approaches and practices. More narrowly, the commitments that I share with Bakhtin as explored above – including the ethical imperative which allows other discourses to sound within texts while retaining the ability of a text to sound in its own voice – prompts a reframing of the ways we read and understand student writing. For me, Bakhtin's theories of dialogue and heteroglossia within his larger body of thought provide both:

- A model for what we'd like student essays to do – to engage other sources and voices responsibly and generously while nonetheless finding a way to speak back to these voices,
- And, what student writing already does: even if we accept the myth of seamless “academic discourse” it is always the case in both essays and student-writing that a variety of differently accented voices sound and jostle against one another, albeit it with different degrees of what we may term awareness or control.⁴⁰

Paying attention to the layers of discursive dialogue within student texts allows us to notice and respond to the multiple, and sometime competing, discourses students bring to bear on their academic writing as well as the extent to which they've located themselves within the particular discourses advanced in particular classrooms. More than hoping to smooth out these rough edges, the connections I've offered above to Bakhtin's scholarship allow us to perceive the “live” relationships between language and the social. And they allow students a way to account for the hybrid tensions and dialogic stylistics in the

⁴⁰ This assertion is in dialogue with claims made by David Bartholomae in “Inventing the University” that students must negotiate and take on the voices and discourses of the academy if their writing is to be judged successful. Here I argue alongside Bartholomae that it is valuable work to advocate and teach a type of writing that doesn't so seamlessly subsume other voices and their realities – that doesn't default to seamless writing and tidy commonplaces instead of more complex (and probably, at least initially, more messy) prose and ideas.

texts they both read and write, thus offering them a greater rhetorical, linguistic, and culturally situated awareness.

Thus, although Bakhtin writes that “linguistics, stylistics, and the philosophy of language....have sought first and foremost for ‘*unity* in diversity’,” he offers us a way to move beyond this centripetal tendency and in so doing, to more fully and responsibly grapple with the “life and behavior of discourse in a contradictory and multi-langued world” (274-5). As more and more of our students continue to negotiate the multiple languages they bring to the classroom, Bakhtin provides one productive lens for thinking through the interactions and hybridizations such discursive collisions create. Bakhtin, himself, seems to acknowledge such pressures when he writes that,

The resistance of a unitary, canonic language, of a national myth bolstered by a yet-unshaken unity, is still too strong for heteroglossia to relativize and decenter literary and language consciousness. This verbal-ideological decentering will occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among *other* cultures and languages. (370)

Given the globalizing nature of our contemporary world, such a Bakhtinian lens is not only helpful, but necessary. It is by attending to these issues and contexts – to the multiple soundings of language – that we can best take up Bakhtin’s project to attend to discourse in our “multi-langued world” and, in so doing, “reimagine the composition classroom as the multilingual space that it is, where the presence of language differences is the default” (Matsuda, 649). In the conclusion to this chapter and in the chapters that follow I provide my own rejoinder to this ongoing dialogue by considering the possibilities the hybrid essay articulates to increasingly pressing questions about language diversity. Exemplary in its heteroglossia and the productive dialogism between discourses and ways of knowing, the hybrid essay is also remarkable for the ways that it makes these interactions readily visible and thus available for student use. As students practice confronting a range of discourses – becoming more aware of these discourses *as* discourses via their difference and juxtaposition – their readings of these texts and

the compositions they, too, create constitute productive grapplings with the ways our words live on the boundary, replete with the soundings of both our own voice and the voices of others.

1.3.4 Difficulty as Epistemology: Extending the Dialogue

In the previous section on Adorno, I offered one pedagogical strategy I often use extensively in my composition courses: the difficulty essay. In order to further illustrate the praxis of engaging difficulty as fundamental to an essayistic impetus, and in order to bring the elements of Bakhtin's scholarship I've detailed above into the conversation, I turn below to an excerpted example of a student difficulty essay in response to the assignment I previously described. Although the essayistic impetus in this writing is more restricted in purpose than the essays I will explore later in this dissertation, it is nonetheless suggestive of an epistemological motive to puzzle through something via the act of writing. It is my contention that such difficulty essays allow students to construct an intellectual arena through which they make meaning in dialogue with difficult texts. Moreover, such meaning-making occurs in an ongoing and sustained fashion throughout the term (students write many such essays throughout the term and student difficulty essays often refer to previous conversations or texts and make connections to conversations we've had throughout the course.) Demonstrating one example of this intellectual arena is the following excerpted difficulty paper written by a first year composition student in a writing course centered on essay films (a form I will turn to in the last chapter.) Although this student-writer, Kim Hinzman, is just beginning to work with two of the primary discourses of Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* – the discourse of vision (and thus documentary) as a privileged form of understanding versus the negation of this discourse in favor of that of experiential understanding – she nonetheless identifies and begins to negotiate these discourses by puzzling through the dialogic interaction of words and images in the film.

Due to the essay's length and my limited space here, I'll note that Hinzman begins her difficulty essay by situating this film in relationship to another film by the same director; she also connects her discussion to persistent themes of the class: "memory, the reliability of memory, and the process of

forgetting.” After identifying her difficulty with the opening (quite difficult and disembodied) sequence depicting the embrace of two lovers covered, seemingly, in atomic ash, Hinzman then poses the following question to prompt her inquiry: “What is the connection between the images in this sequence and the verbal contradictions [in the voiceover dialogue]?” In short, Hinzman seeks to think through not only the contradictions between the two discourses I identified above, but the relationship between a highly expressive form of representation (the film’s initial images) and the significant documentary footage the film also deploys. Hinzman tracks her inquiries in this way:

This visually confusing image could be meant to draw a parallel between the past and the present – thus relating the lovers to a general whole so that their stories may relate to the general populous. Between these scenes, there are tracking shots through 1950s Hiroshima – through a hospital, the streets, and a museum [documentary footage]. Basically, the popular story of Hiroshima is told through pictures. Voiced over this is the conversation of the man and the woman, “You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.” The woman replies, “I saw everything. Everything.” She trails through what she has seen and the man negates everything. The tracking camera seems to be meant to be her eye, so we see everything in Hiroshima that she sees. The viewer feels that he/she has seen much, and consequently that the woman has seen much, but the man says we have not. Who are we to believe?

I’m sure that it is by now evident that this is a complex and difficult film (and I’ll note as a sidebar that students write their difficulty essays before we discuss the film or text in the larger intellectual arena of our shared classroom.) Although Hinzman’s interpretations may be hard to understand without knowing the film, I hope the ways that she draws two parallel contradictions into the sphere of her essay for analysis is evident. Moreover, her analysis below attempts to uncover some of the tension between these two contradictory discourses as, in fact, contradictory ways of knowing. She continues:

Once the negations of the man are called into consideration the two pairs of bodies could be used to show the forgetting of events over time. An older generation, the first bodies, have a more concrete understanding of the tragedy because they were old enough during the bombing to understand it as adults. They are covered in ash. They can’t really escape the reality of the bombing. The younger couple couldn’t have been old enough to truly evaluate the bombing and only come to understand it over time. Thus, they are not

covered in ash, but it isn't clear in the picture what substance does cover them. This ambiguity could be a parallel to the ambiguity over the reliability of memory and reenactments that the man and the woman are discussing. Resnais is opening up the possibility to the viewer for multiple realities – none of them being necessarily correct because when it comes down to it, each person will have his/her own perspective on an event and his/her own capacity to understand just as the man and woman understand Hiroshima differently and have different ideas as to what constitutes “seeing” the story behind the event.

In attempting to forge a valid connection between the ambiguous image and the ambiguous voiceover narration, Hinzman begins to uncover the ways that certain representations stand in for particular ways of knowing or experiencing trauma: experiencing and understanding versus coming to know over time; relying on memory versus experiencing reenactment (especially through documentary techniques like museums); and forgetting altogether. Although she initially maps the ambiguities she identifies onto differences in generation – a less interpretively tenable prospect in the film than mapping difference onto the national differences between the two characters (French and Japanese) – she nonetheless productively brings together perhaps the richest parts of the film's first half in ways that enable her to allow each to productively inform the other. Placing these complex aspects of the film within an intellectual space for contemplation, she moves dialogically between the narration and the somewhat disconnected visual images in order to attempt understanding.

In my estimation, what is admirable in this essay and in student difficulty essays more broadly speaking, is the way such an assignment fosters and encourages students to come to grips with the dialogic and heteroglot interactions within texts. By allowing students to begin with the difficulties they notice in terms of such interactions, and in encouraging students to move among ideas and interpretations, such assignments encourage the essayistic impetus and the dialogic interaction I have been describing in relationship to Adorno and Bakhtin. One pedagogy among many possible pedagogies, the difficulty essay provides a concrete site for students to practice essayistic thought and dialogic conversation between their ideas and texts and those of others.

1.4 A WAY FORWARD

In this chapter I have argued that the “essay” has historically served as a placeholder for all types of student-writing, standing in as the marker of undergraduate (and secondary-level) writing that nonetheless does little to specify actual texts, writing practices, or pedagogical underpinnings. The essay has persisted largely unquestioned, limiting the ways that we can discuss, and indeed think, its possibilities and opportunities. One way to address this problem is to hold together, within the same conceptual framework, the two practitioners of the essay (the student and the intellectual) as I have argued above. Particularly as the space “between the poles” of the ‘essay as idea’ and the ‘essay as reality’ takes on new characteristics – pushing new textual boundaries, exploring new ways of knowing our world, and using the essay for new purposes – we must turn our critical attention to the ways that both of these figures encounter the changes these texts present and what these changes mean.

The hermeneutic framework Adorno offers provides a key site for this rethinking. For Adorno, meaning is constructed not wholly by the author in isolation, but between the reader and the text – this supposition is crucial to Adorno’s understanding of the essay’s epistemological function. Adorno figures the reader dynamically and importantly; indeed, the reader is drawn into a dialogical relationship with the text. Adorno’s theorization of both the essay (and its epistemological impetus) and the student (and her productive naiveté and willingness to engage the difficult) is therefore helpful in refiguring both figures within composition. For Adorno, the student essay-writer is a figure well-suited to enact the difficult interpretative practices that fruitful reading and writing demand.

Bakhtin contributes an enlivened sense of the diverse and socially-inflected nature of language to this expanded hermeneutic framework. Bakhtin’s theoretical contribution is found in the idea that discourses are always in dialogue and interaction – discourse talks not only in but “with” other discourses. This theory is particularly useful for the field of Composition in the way that it can reposition our work as twofold: paying attention to language and discourses as they appear in writing on the page, and also paying attention to the way these (written) representations of language circulate with and against other

languages. In this way, our understanding of language becomes fundamentally mediated and situated: language and meaning are situated in and connected to the history of utterances, and these utterances, in turn, are not private and individuated, but essentially dialogic and public. The hybrid essay, as I've argued, makes these relationships particularly visible and available for scrutiny.

Joining Adorno's model of the student engaged in the epistemological and dialogic project of essay-writing with Bakhtin's description of heteroglossia pushes us to question the historical formation of the composition classroom as a place of remediation or acculturation, student writing as lacking, un-unified and un-coherent in the ways the text is marked by competing forces and utterances. As I've argued, the place where the rich range of discourse and ideas can most effectively be explored is not only in the polyphonic novel, as Bakhtin suggests, but also in the very essays read and written in composition classes. In situating the essay beyond the sphere of individualized consciousness since it critiques structures of empiricism, rationality, and systematization in order to make visible the paralyzing divisions that result, Adorno highlights the critical and demystifying force of the essay. A Bakhtinian view of the essay makes visible the powerful and electrifying material reality of language and the many discourses that constitute our world. Since each theorist is committed to making method and style visible as constructs – one way of going about things among other, often discipline driven, ways – they highlight the ways that singular versions of method or style can sometimes limit what is said or considered. This critical practice seems especially essential for students navigating a liberal arts education since it serves as a reminder that method and style are never a priori and singular constructs, but are particular choices among a range of possibilities.

The site where these critical investigations take place is within Adorno's formulation of the thinker converted into an "arena of intellectual experience" – a place where the essay makes visible the method by which we come to know (which, in contrast, "traditional thought" works to naturalize) (160-1). And it is here that I find an extremely fruitful metaphor for both the student and the critic within the university. Just as the elements of the essay emerge as a type of force field where meanings and discourse inter-relate instead of being separated out one from another, the essayist occupies a similar space in which

she draws experiences and texts, readings and writings, together. In my writing classes, this metaphor of the arena or force field is crucial to teaching the essay as committed to the processes of thinking instead of viewing thought as an objectified entity translatable onto the page. This process of thinking is thus grounded in, instead of removed from, its ongoing, material reality. Likewise, the student writing such essays is better positioned to be in significant conversation with the utterances of others and thereby to be situated more firmly and powerfully within history.

My description of such a recuperated essay highlights the ways that the essay, driven by an epistemological impetus, must always be in process, always under revision; the essay is a conditional construction that constantly works to test its parts and its methods in constellation fashion in order to know better and more fully. Although both theorists suggest that the cost of this testing is born by the strain manifested in the unstable prose and its hybridized style, this strain need not be negative. Like Bakhtin's novel, the essay foregrounds the inadequacy of a unitary style and points instead to the rich heterogeneity of discourse. In similar fashion, the "excess of intention" Adorno posits as a marker of the essay's struggle may, in fact, elicit a productive way of reading style in student writing. It is by positing the essay as incapable of (and uninterested in) occupying the privileged space of an aesthetically totalizing master-piece that we can begin to overturn the historical authority this pressure has consistently denied such figures as student and women writers.⁴¹

As I hope I've shown, these historical theorizations of the essay offer several ways to figure the essay as a site of intellectual activity *par excellence*. Through its critical capability the essay offers a strategy for mending the disciplinary clefts that divide the academy through increased awareness of the ways methods and discourses shape our projects. It is my contention – and the work of this dissertation to illustrate – that the essay re-appropriates a space between binary classifications and thus extends and enriches what it is possible to think. It is here that the essay opens up a space for intellectual engagement,

⁴¹Yet although we may imagine this reading of the essay's stylistic inconsistencies as a heuristic in the writing classroom for making questions of methodology and style increasingly present, I must nonetheless argue again that we must be wary of the ways that the essay's visible excesses may be unsympathetically read as yet another failure at mastery, an interpretation which would continue to deny writers authority and critical attention.

questioning, critique, and reflection: precisely the work that we encourage in our students as they develop and sustain the complexities of reading and writing practices. Using the essay as a crucible which tests interpretation and pushes the meanings of words farther – not through definition, but through juxtaposition and heteroglossia – creates an inter-disciplinary practice that brings ideas, methodologies, and assumptions about the borders between disciplines and discourses into dialogical exchange.

Pedagogically speaking, the metaphors that Bakhtin and Adorno offer can productively shift our framework for teaching the essay and reading our students' work. Adorno's notion of the dense carpet weaving together multiple threads provides an evocative description of textual richness dependent upon interconnection. Bakhtin's assertion that such multiple threads make visible the heteroglossia present in language provides a way to imagine and construct an ethical dialogue between discourses, allowing each to "sound." Such a dialogic conversation exemplifies Adorno's methodological advice to "move through the fissures" instead of smoothing them over. And the models of difficulty and dialogue the essay embraces offer ways to construct a productive praxis that uses essay writing to push knowledge further.

Although I do not want to naïvely suggest that the essay can become the sole, or even primary, redemptive form for both the writing student and the university, I do believe that if we remain open to the intellectual work the essay permits we may be surprised by what writers at all levels can achieve. An enriched articulation of the essay's impetus, method, and style seem valuable theorizations for the writing classroom, the writing teacher, and the writing student, as well as generative for alternative models of work inside the university.

Building on the intellectual history of the essay I've developed in this chapter, the next chapter continues this intervention by establishing a mid-century pedagogical point of reference. If Adorno's metaphor of the essay as an intellectual arena can combine with his idea of the productive naiveté of the student to allow us to teach difficult essays as collaborative intellectual activity, and if Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and heteroglossia suggest a particularly strong case for the teaching of essays which foreground the ways that discourses are drawn together, to what extent did the broadly circulated pedagogies of Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks (also public intellectuals and contemporaries of

Adorno and Bakhtin) take up such understandings of essays and their styles? Since I've argued that it is important to keep these intellectually rigorous and rich theories of the essay in mind and connect them to the writing practices within our classrooms, the next chapter investigates the large swath of pedagogies that dominated many English classrooms during the mid-part of the twentieth century – pedagogies remarkable for their attention to the essay and prose style, pedagogies remarkable for the ways that they sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed.

The convergence of these theoretical and pedagogical contexts precipitates my move in the last three chapters to the hybrid essays that I see as the most compelling and interesting movement in contemporary essay-writing. Such essays take up many of the goals expressed in this chapter. I argue that these hybrid essays extend and invigorate the intellectual tradition of the essay I've reconstructed. Pedagogically, such essays allow students a site to develop increased rhetorical, generic, and stylistic awareness. Moreover, such hybrid essays point to important changes in literacy practices and their ensuing demands; they can thereby serve as a conceptual bridge toward creating successful pedagogies in a textually and linguistically diverse and changing landscape. For those of us who believe in using the essay as a concrete way to unite beginning and advanced university writers in a “force field” of intellectual activity, the following chapters pry apart the ways the essay has been and can be taught in order to find new possibilities for the essay, for ourselves, and for our students.

2.0 TEACHING WITH STYLE: FORM, GENRE AND PEDAGOGY IN BROOKS AND WARREN

Every textbook is an archive of instruction...It carries out inherited attitudes, visible, for example, in a proposed sequence of learning, in notions about student work or progress, in evaluative terms or standards, in its pedagogical routines.

- Carr, Carr, and Schultz, *Archives of Instruction*

In a 1954 article for *The Journal of Higher Education* Professor Clarence Kulishek assessed *Understanding Poetry* – the most famous textbook authored by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks – and the ensuing entrance of the new criticism into the “hurly-burly of the sprawling undergraduate world” (174). Kulishek argued that the Brooks and Warren textbooks were “so conceived and so constructed as to change radically conventional conceptions of how literature should be taught (method) and what literature should be taught (selections)” (174-5). Moreover, since these texts “recognize and emphasize the prime importance of a critical apparatus designed to acquaint the student (and the teacher, too...) with the exacting techniques of close reading,” Kulishek noted that the “elaborate apparatus was perhaps the most controversial feature of the original Brooks and Warren text” (176).

This chapter investigates two lines of textbooks also authored by Brooks and Warren, textbooks which have not received nearly the critical attention as the *Understanding Poetry* series. These texts – *An Approach to Literature* and *Modern Rhetoric* – make visible how these authors understood the essay and essayistic style from the point of view of both literature and composition through attention to this “controversial” apparatus. In addition to unearthing the pedagogies and practices that attempted to teach a less central area of new critical interest – nonfiction prose, as opposed to venerated poetry – my

research suggests the broader literary and compositional practices Brooks and Warren supported and encouraged. Attending to these pedagogies not only provides insight to practices introduced broadly across the humanities and introductory English courses nationwide, but also illustrates the sometimes conflicted ways that Brooks and Warren presented their own theoretical and pedagogical views regarding the nature of language, interpretation, and history during the same period that public intellectuals such as Adorno and Bakhtin were considering similar issues.

As I argued in the first chapter, the generic form of the essay encourages a wide range of interpretive practices for both readers and writers. Moreover, the genre of the essay in both its traditional and emergent forms constitutes the most crucial genre for students since, despite its many definitions and perceived purposes, the essay is the primary site of production and evaluation for students working in general education and the humanities. As I will argue in this chapter, the comparison of changes over the course of four editions of each textbook reveals the complex ways these American theorists interpreted both the work of literature and composition, as well as the ways they interpreted and shaped students through offering technologies of reading and writing. A central finding I explore below is that the changes across literature textbooks were dramatically different in kind – even opposed to – those changes that occurred in composition textbooks. In many ways, these differences perhaps illustrate a familiar and expected story about the divisions between literature and composition. Despite moments of intersection and interrelation, the results after four editions of each textbook are markedly opposed in terms of how they figure writing, style, and students. However, paying attention to the concrete ways these textbooks changed, developed, and in some cases, reified, provides a more fully nuanced account of actual pedagogies during this long and important period.

Of course, textbooks and their aims shifted and changed in response to perceived demands by students, teachers, and the wider textbook market. However, since current university courses often attend to literary and compositional style only in advanced seminars or advanced, non-required courses in writing, these textbooks illustrate clear attempts to tackle this notoriously difficult subject with beginning university students. For Brooks and Warren, the pressure of representing the essay is registered in a

discourse around discerning and characterizing the essay's "style," and for them, as for many scholars of style, this feature of writing is intimately tied to personality. Thus, style becomes a way of becoming a particular type of writer. If, as Lester Faigley argues, writing instruction has historically been as much about "the selves we want out students to be" as the writing we want them to produce, my research also suggests how the Brooks and Warren textbooks illustrate each of these desires through the pedagogical apparatus (114). Indeed, it is the apparatus which most suggestively makes visible their theoretical and pedagogical fluctuations in attending to style, the essay, and student writing. It is thus through comparisons of the multiple editions' apparatus, then, that the findings of my research demonstrate how discussions of style became central and productive to particular interpretative practices – such as reading – while becoming distant from other interpretative practices – such as writing.

2.1 THE STORY'S BEGINNING: STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND NEW CRITICISM

The story of the Brooks and Warren textbooks begins at Louisiana State University where the two men were reunited as colleagues and as teachers. Although they had worked and thought together as friends and students – at both Vanderbilt and Oxford – it was at LSU, where they were faced with teaching four classes each semester in addition to producing scholarship and editing the journal *The Southern Review*, that they developed a pedagogy of close-reading in the classroom. The aim of such a pedagogy was democratic: to provide students a method and the necessary tools to interpret texts on their own, especially at large state universities such as LSU. Brooks describes his relationship with Warren and their beginning collaboration which would span over four decades in this way:

Robert Penn Warren and I found ourselves in the mid 1930's teaching at the Louisiana State University...Among other things, each of us was teaching a section of the department's course in literary forms and types. Granted that Warren and I were young men excited by the new trends in literature and granted that our heads were full of literary theory.... nevertheless, our dominant motive was not to implant new fangled ideas in the

innocent Louisiana sophomores we faced three times a week. Our motive was to try to solve a serious practical problem.

Our students, many of them bright enough and certainly amiable and charming enough, had no notion of how to read a literary text. (“Forty Years of ‘Understanding Poetry’” 167-8)

Brooks and Warren began working on this “serious practical problem” with John Thibaut Pursur. The result was *An Approach to Literature*, printed by LSU in 1936 as their first published textbook. Even as Brooks and Warren began revising a second edition of *An Approach to Literature* (1939), *Understanding Poetry* had already hit the stands in 1938. This pace of textbook publishing continued for the next forty years with new textbooks such as *Understanding Fiction* and *Modern Rhetoric* rounding out the mix: on average a new textbook was released or revised every several years, in addition to the creative and scholarly work each man penned.

From the outset, Brooks and Warren established their new critical approach as a corrective to other “popular” textbooks which relied on philology, biography, and inspirational interpretation. The authors aimed to defend students from what they saw as elite and dilettantish practices by encouraging them to strive for precise interpretations grounded in the text, attending to all aspects of the text instead of isolating out particularities. Given this approach, the apparatus of each text provided the central site by which the editors led students (and sometimes teachers) through the new critical method.¹ The benefits of the new critical method were not thought to stop in the classroom however; the new critics wanted to extend this panacea to all, hoping that their democratic method of textual criticism would allow readers of all kinds a way to cultivate humanistic endeavors.

The liberatory aspiration that Brooks and Warren maintained toward readers and students dovetailed with their desire to rescue literary theory from the limited interpretive frameworks of philology

¹ Although the teacher is figured as not needing to review these misconceptions, part of the textbook’s methodology may extend to providing teachers a heads-up just in case. Faced with an influx of students after World War II, many teachers were both overworked and undertrained. The chances that teachers might also embody such “misconceptions” are lessened as the editors work to create a clean slate, a level playing field democratic not only in the range of readers the text directs itself toward, but also “democratic” in the ways that it discounts – equally – prior knowledge and experience so that all readers may proceed in exactly the same manner. For more on how textbooks instruct, interpolate, and discipline teachers in addition to students see Debra Hawhee’s “Composition History and the Harbrace College Handbook,” Libby Miles “Constructing Composition,” and Nedra Reynolds “Dusting off Instructor’s Manuals.”

and literary biography that had marked pedagogy in the early 20th century. Indeed, the democratization of reading practices and literary study were among the most stated goals of the Brooks and Warren textbooks.² One way of allowing all readers to interpret texts was to resituate the work of interpretation on the text itself – the words before the reader that didn’t depend on the esoteric bibliographical knowledge that some students might have and others might not. This focus on the text itself prompted the now familiar critiques of new criticism as isolationist and ahistorical. However, despite the ways that the field of English studies perceives itself as beyond new criticism, scholars such as Gerald Graff and Frank Lentricchia contend that the specters of the new critical perspective continue to haunt contemporary theory and practice.³ Lentricchia writes that the new criticism lives on not only as an “imposing and repressive father-figure” but also in the “subtle denial of history” and the ways that contemporary theory is connected to, not discontinuous from, new criticism (xiii.) Graff goes even further to suggest that even opponents of the new criticism often use the methods and tenets of new criticism in order to critique it.⁴ Such observations thus warrant a brief synopsis of new criticism, its investments, and its effects.

From our contemporary point in literary scholarship, the tenets of new criticism – and their dangers – ring familiar in English departments nationwide. That the new critics treated literature as a sacred text cordoned off from the world and from history, allowing it to exist as art for art’s sake; that the intentional and affective fallacies developed by certain new critics assisted in this exclusion and constricted the range of activities and concerns of fruitful reading practices; that the focus on unity, organicism, and totality in texts, combined with a drive for recognizing universal systems of humanistic understanding applied in a scientific manner, flattened the dialectic between reader and text and between

² As Brooks-critic Jewel Spears Booker notes, Brooks was clearly “stimulated in part by pedagogical earnestness” in his drive to move beyond early 20th-century textbooks whose “theories of mimesis, of genesis, and of reception seemed to have exhausted themselves” (131). Booker argues that Brooks did not exclude these approaches as fully unproductive, but instead as often ineffective in pedagogic isolation, thus opting instead for “an approach that stimulated readers to focus with intelligence on the text” (131).

³ In addition to his volume *After the New Criticism* cited here, see also Lentricchia’s early article “The Place of Cleanth Brooks” which provides a solid history of Brooks’ early theoretical positions.

⁴ Graff characterizes the context of the New Criticism as “part of the general revolt against empiricism which characterizes modern intellectual history – and which today animates those who believe themselves to be opponents of the New Criticism” (137). He has several populations in mind, although he explicitly names the field of phenomenological hermeneutics as a prime example.

conflicting ideas; that these practices contained an impetus to discern (and protect) the most appropriate, most artistic, and most valued artistic work within the distinct field of literary studies driven by highly privileged, arbitrary, limited, and elitist tendencies; and that the sum of these practices resulted in a hierarchy of proper reading practices (and thus “proper” readers) often elevating critics within academies to the height of these hierarchies – these versions of new criticism as an overly mechanized, formalized, bourgeois, de-historicized practice yielding few productive gains persist in critical discourse representing the mid-twentieth century’s new criticism. And there is truth to many of these charges.

Yet as scholarship and criticism move forward, the representations of the past are always in danger of becoming increasingly simplistic – even caricatured – in efforts to distinguish the new and progressive from what has been problematic in previous theories. From this recognition, Graff’s incisive discussion of new criticism is helpful in understanding the impetus of the methodology as well as why it failed. The locus of this failure can perhaps be glimpsed even from the list of charges I’ve enumerated above: as Graff puts it, “the necessity to fight battles on so great a variety of fronts forced the new criticism to stretch its concepts till they became ambiguous” and moreover until they became contradictory and muddled (141). To ward off the “hedonistic impressionism and genteel moralism” that Graff notes was residual from earlier periods, the new critics advocated a more circumspect interpretive practice that did not linger in rapturous pleasure or didactic lessons (140). To ward off the popular practices advocated by biographers and philologists, the new critics recommended concentrating on the text itself. And in order to defend literature from the pull of scientific positivism, the new critics were forced to argue for literature’s connection, as Cleanth Brooks put it, to the “facts of experience,” a realm which might be objectively recognized as its own mode of knowledge (*The Well Wrought Urn*, qtd. in Graff, 142).

Literature was thus both objective and self-sufficient unto itself, while still connecting somehow to the larger world and the realm of experience.⁵ Focusing on the text in isolation was (also

⁵ All of the primary scholars of new criticism I’ve cited here seem to agree that the new critics did not, as usually charged, divorce the text entirely from historical contexts. The exercises I examine support this interpretation, as do

paradoxically) a way to restore literature's place and value over and against the mechanistic, industrial, positivistic forces of society, a way to train students, as Mark Jancovich puts it, to be aware of "the paradoxes and contradictions repressed by capitalist rationality" (88). The method designed to fulfill these contradictory goals was, of course, close textual analysis. Graff summarizes the range of specific critiques this method of interpretation hoped to dispel:

The method of close textual analysis was a response on one side to those who dismissed literature as a frivolity and on the other side to those who defended it in terms which rendered it frivolous. Close textual analysis, producing evidence of the richness and complexity of literary works, simultaneously answered the impressionist, who viewed the work as a mere occasion for pleasurable excitement, the message-hunter or political propagandist, who reduced the work to mere uplifting propositions, and the positivist, who denied any significance to the work at all. And close analysis of meaning could also demonstrate to the historians and biographers that a literary work was more than a datum in the history of ideas or the life of the author. (141)

Thus, the new critical method of textual analysis, though perceived in retrospect as isolationist, was intended to result in exactly the opposite phenomenon – to restore literature to a central place in the culture at large and to use its values to combat disconnected, overly formalized existence.

Given the number of challenges this method set out to correct, it now comes as no surprise that it could not succeed as a permanent literary movement, whether or not such a movement is even possible. Part of the problem was perhaps an oversimplification of the foe they were attacking. As Graff suggests, the new critics failed when they adopted the equation of rational thought with the mechanized societal forces they sought to disrupt. Adopting this analogy prompted them to "oppose rational objectivity to experience and doom themselves to the polarizations they aim to heal" (149).⁶ In attempting to save

reviews at the time. For an emphatic renunciation of the charge of ahistoricism, see Mark Jancovich, particularly his chapter "Understanding Literature: Textbooks and the Distribution of the New Criticism."

⁶ It is essential to note that the new critics are not the only school of thought that Graff charges with falling into this trap. Indeed, by Graff's account many of the interpretive communities (up to 1979 when *Literature Against Itself*

literature from its host of differently antagonistic opponents the new criticism was not only pulled in too many directions to sustain itself, but it also experienced a fundamental dislocation of theory from method.

However, from a pedagogical point of view, the effects of this dislocation are surprisingly minimal, particularly in the *Approach to Literature* series. Indeed, the pedagogical apparatus seems to be the central site where theoretical nuances continue to emerge via innovations in pedagogy. As I will show in the following section, this is particularly the case with the interworkings of style as a literary feature. Even when style falls out of the theoretical discussion of the essay, for example, the pedagogical apparatus continues to pursue a language for addressing style and encouraging students to learn to discern and describe stylistic affects. Different than this finding, however, is the research I will present in the second section on Brooks' and Warren's composition textbook. Perhaps because Brooks and Warren are less hinged to composition and rhetorical theory in general, I argue that the oscillations between theory and practice are more severe and disruptive across *Modern Rhetoric*, resulting ultimately in pedagogical as well as theoretical paucity.

These differences are mirrored in the different kinds of student the textbooks construct, despite the ways in which critical reading as a transformative process remained a tenet of Brooks' and Warren's ideology throughout editions. As Faigley writes, "While we no longer hold that the experience of reading literature will directly lead students to a position of heightened awareness," as teachers we "are still very much concerned with the self" (114). Textbooks often presume this self to be a "rational, coherent, and unitary individual" (153). As Deborah Hawhee and others have argued, textbooks not only shaped the content of the course, but more importantly shaped students and teachers by constructing and disciplining specific subject positions for them to occupy. Indeed, H.R. Swardson pointed out in response to the

was published) have fallen prey to the same binary oppositions, the result for each being that they "assigned ambitious cultural functions to literature while defining literature in a way that obstructed carrying out these functions" thus making them ineffectual (147). An example of a long problematic binary is that of "inside" and "outside." It is Graff's claim that the new critics did not grossly ignore either history or culture but instead mistakenly perceived these forces to be extrinsic (though perhaps meaningful) instead of intrinsic (and thus constitutive.) In his conclusion to *Professing Literature*, Graff turns to Bakhtin's theory of the utterance as rejoinder (via theorist Don Bialostosky) in order to illustrate the necessary interaction and influence of cultural discourses upon one another. Since a dialogical theory of literature acknowledges "each discourse as an actual or potential response to other discourses," as Bialostosky claims, the new critics' biggest mistake was "to imagine that what does not appear in the text does not impinge upon it" (qtd. in Graff, 257).

Brooks and Warren textbooks that the new critical revolution was not, in fact, the focus on the text, but a refocusing on the character of the reader/writer/student in classical terms (rational, skeptical, consistent, etc.) (417-20). As my analysis illustrates below, the type of reader and student Brooks' and Warren's texts aimed to construct was at times, and perhaps surprisingly, one we probably still value today: curious and skeptical, sensitive to language and style, capable of comparison and synthesis, and above all, interested in acts of reading closely, reading well, and bringing this critical attention to bear on their own ideas and prose. Despite the familiar claims of new critics treating each text on its own terms then, my work suggests how close attention to texts as a pedagogical approach can remain useful, particularly for texts such as essays which may not immediately fulfill our expectations as readers.

2.2 BARELY LITERARY: ESSAYS, THEORETICALLY SPEAKING, AND AN APPROACH TO LITERATURE

Although *Understanding Poetry* is popularly understood as the textbook which institutionalized the new critical approach, *An Approach to Literature* – Brooks' and Warren's first textbook – also dispersed the new criticism beyond LSU. As Brooks and Warren scholar James Grimshaw, Jr. notes, *An Approach to Literature* was being taught at institutions as geographically diverse as Auburn, Tufts, Cornell, Colgate, and North Dakota, among others, as early as 1939 (27). As the textbooks swept the nation and as theoretical scholarship related to new criticism continued to grow, the reception of Brooks' and Warren's textbooks grew as well.⁷ Generally positive, reviews of the literature-based textbooks note the wide influence they had on the field and the positive pedagogies they have fostered.

⁷ Sales of textbooks are notoriously difficult to gauge. Numbers referenced in the correspondence between authors may act as a rough illustration: the 2nd edition of *Modern Rhetoric* released in early 1958 had already passed the 20,000 mark by July (Grimshaw 218), and in under two years, a fourth edition of *An Approach to Literature* (1964) sold over 99,000 copies (Grimshaw 264). See also the Introduction to James A. Grimshaw, Jr.'s *Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren: A Literary Correspondence* for a helpful history of the collaboration on and release of these textbooks.

Indeed the only critique the literature textbooks typically received considered the extent to which the text should offer a pedagogical apparatus. For example, Professor Geoffrey Wagner, reviewing in 1956, writes that:

The Brooks and Warren readers...consist of admirably selected passages of literature – poetry, prose and drama – with pertinent and often profound comments. They are challenged as being too pedantically the fruit of the American school of New Criticism, of which Professor Brooks is allegedly the Dean. However, I personally feel that this is one place [the undergraduate classroom, especially in the first two years] where the New Criticism – close textual analysis keeping historical and biographical data to the background – is vitally to the point. My only criticism of the Brooks and Warren textbook is that it tends to do too much for the teacher: the numerous questions appended after each selection exhaust the topic and tend to rob the teacher of opportunities for exercising his own gifts. (227)

The problem that Wagner notes is certainly always an issue in textbooks, as they walk a fine line between being too pedantic and providing a range of materials that might be useful to both teacher and student. And, as Brooks and Warren often note in the introductions to their texts, volumes are rarely used from cover to cover, exercise by exercise; instead, their aim seems to be to present more material than necessary from which the teacher may choose.⁸

Given the range of influence the Brooks and Warren textbooks had, as well as the ways that *An Approach to Literature* preceded and influenced the approaches later present in *Understanding Poetry*, this understudied volume is worth increased critical attention. In this section, my focus will be twofold. First, I will illustrate the text's theoretical approach to the essay. As the textbook where Brooks and Warren specifically considered the difference between genres as well as differences in poetic and prosaic

⁸ In his chapter on textbooks in *Fragments of Rationality*, Faigley rightly notes that studies focusing primarily on textbooks lack the ability to determine how these texts were used, appropriated, and challenged by teachers and students. The adoption of a particular textbook, however, is telling in and of itself: "That the choice of textbook is also considered significant within the field is evident when teachers answer with the name of a textbook when asked how they teach writing" (133). Moreover, Faigley's contention that "if textbooks are not a reliable source of data for how writing is actually taught, they do reflect teachers' and program directors' decisions about how writing should be represented to students," is a useful distinction (133). Coupled with the context my chapter provides in terms of the reception of these texts, Faigley's argument points to the ways that textbook study is important for understanding the representations of writing and reading, students and teachers.

form, *An Approach to Literature* provides solid ground for assessing both theoretical and pedagogical approaches to the essay that spanned forty years. Second, in comparison to the editors' somewhat muddled theoretical explanation of the essay, I will detail the more productive and rich attention to essays and essayistic style which occurs across revised editions of the textbook via the pedagogical apparatus.

An Approach to Literature's actual approach is characterized as a "simple" attempt to study across literary genres, designed to "bring into the classroom some of the insights that had been provided by criticism since Coleridge and to set these insights, especially when dealing with more mature students, in some context of literary and social history" (v).⁹ This approach, then "painstakingly and thoroughly applied" in order to be most useful, contains an introduction to each section – fiction, poetry, biography, the essay, and drama – with exercises accompanying most selections. The preface primarily details the fiction and poetry sections, with the other three generic divisions receiving less attention and serving mainly as connective devices between earlier sections in order to further the principle of interrelation between genres that is stressed by the editors.

By the time we reach the introduction to the essay – one of the "most flexible of forms" and one which has suffered by the encroachment of the modern short story – we have already learned much about the authors' understanding of form and style as they work within literary texts. Here, however, the authors do not spend as much time with how essays "are made" as they do in relationship to fiction; nor do they fully elucidate topics such as "style," "movement," or "exposition" as they do in the section on fiction. With the essay, they seem more intent on differentiating the essay from other prose forms through defining what exactly makes an essay an essay. They begin by addressing content:

Of all the various forms of literature, the essay comes closest to having as its purpose merely the presentation of facts – for the sake of the facts. The essay lies therefore in a sort of borderland which touches on the one side the realm of "pure" literature and on the

⁹ Coleridge, especially his *Biographia Literaria*, was an important influence for Brooks, as it was for many of his generation. For a full discussion and critique of Coleridge's importance to Brooks, see R.S. Crane's 1948 article, "Cleanth Brooks: Or, the Bankruptcy of Critical Monism," which challenges Brooks' move from criticism (he supports the practical work established by Brooks' and Warren's textbooks) to theory in *The Well Wrought Urn*.

other the realm of practical and scientific writings, the realm of chemistry texts and medical prescriptions and cook books. In the essay the writer is concerned primarily with the explanation of a set of facts or perhaps with convincing the reader of the truth of a particular set of ideas. (113)

This initial, somewhat nebulous attempt at defining the essay, thus situates it broadly within the vast “borderland” between strict exposition and “pure literature.” The crucial thing, the editors point out, is the essay’s purpose of relaying information that is mainly factual. Although the authors argue that the essay may be “heavily burdened by the weight of facts,” they write that the essay “can become literature,” although the assumption here is that it must aspire moreover than other literary forms to do so (113).¹⁰ The logical progression the authors erect goes something like this: “The essay, then, may attempt to stir the emotions as well as offer facts to the intellect; and therefore, it may be one of the works of the imagination, and as such, a form of literature” (114). The process of solidifying the essay as a form of literature seems arduous indeed, as the text moves from content, to how content is shaped and presented, to the affects of this presentation and thus a connection to imagination, and finally, via imagination, to a possibility that some essays *may* therefore be understood as literature.

Despite the implication that the essay is more burdened by its content and thus perhaps less literary, the authors are at pains to point out that “*form* and *style* have an important and necessary place even when the main interest of the author may be in convincing his reader of the truth of some practical proposal.” The authors characterize style by shifting their attention to the informal essay’s structure, which “at its best...is not a haphazard one.” The editors write:

Ordinarily, the logic of exposition or the logic of the argument determines the arrangement of the essay. But since in the informal essay this matter does not bulk very large, the arrangement of the material often follows the apparent whim and impulse of the author himself or the apparently casual association of ideas...(115)

¹⁰ Although the authors do not connect the essay to the student-essay – in various editions essays to be written by students are titled more often “themes” or “papers” and only occasionally and in later editions “essays” – there is a familiar ring to the essay being labeled as “not quite” literature due to its (sometimes) more factually driven content.

As seen here, the informal essay provides a type of litmus test for characterizing what an essay, in fact, is. There is a productive tension between the ways the essay might be read as jumping from idea to idea via the author's traveling mind or rambunctious personality, and the impression this might create as, in fact, haphazard. Characterizing this tension between intention and perception proves somewhat difficult for the editors. They are careful to point out –twice – that this impression of random or chaotic “arrangement” is only “apparent,” and is most likely constructed purposefully to give that impression. However, in their final paragraph which attempts to articulate the relationship between structure, style, and form, the struggle to describe how the essay works differently from other literary genres is clear:

It is this fact that sometimes causes us to think of the informal essay as having preeminently style and the other types of essays as lacking it. But the proposition is true, of course, only in a very special sense. It is impossible to have style in a vacuum. The *style*, in its broadest sense, is the arrangement of the writer's materials, the adaptation of his means to his ends in the use of language. If style is an arrangement, there can never be just style – there must be an arrangement of something. But the statement is true in this sense: namely, that in the familiar essay the material is not so much objective fact as it is the sort of fact which one finds in a poem or short story. Consequently, the form is prominent in the familiar essay for the same reason that it is prominent in the poem or short story. (115, original emphasis)

This account will sound familiar for the common sense it makes, despite its somewhat circular reasoning. Informal/personal essays “seem” as though they have more “style” partially because they have less “fact”; thus, their material is more similar to that of a poem or short story, and likewise, they seem more stylistically literary than those essays the authors have deemed formal or factual.

As I will show below, these attempts at defining the essay, its style, and how it functions as a form of literature remain difficult for Brooks and Warren throughout the four editions of *An Approach to Literature* that deal with the essay.¹¹ The relationship of form and content seems at the heart of these difficulties. The editors consider content to be the driving force of factual, personal, and speculative essays. Yet although the editors ground their accounts of form in both authorial intention and in a sense

¹¹ The fifth and final edition of *An Approach to Literature*, published in 1975, jettisons the section on the essay entirely.

of rhetorical purpose, form becomes a manner, usually, of syncing the disparate elements of a text so as to create the “single effect” of the text. “Style” is thus often the result of a “lack of content.” And unlike content, terms and features of style and form are only described by a series of synonymous approximations. Although the editors aim to narrow the gulf between “fine literature” and the essay’s “practical exposition of facts,” what results is the essay as an only slightly less marginalized form, bound and determined especially by its content. What is remarkable, then, is that despite these vague theoretical descriptions the authors do develop more effective ways of asking students to work with and account for essays and their styles over the four editions. It is primarily through the pedagogical apparatus, then, that we can see an enriched sense of the essay developing – for both students and, it seems, for the editors themselves.

2.3 ESSAYS IN ACTION: PEDAGOGICAL APPARATUS AS DEFINING WHAT ESSAYS (AND STUDENTS) CAN AND SHOULD DO

If your educational experience in any way resembled mine, you have been uncertain about what style is. *Style* was a familiar enough word for you, but your concept of style was probably vague...because our own teachers spent little or no time talking about style....If we listed ourselves as members of that post-World War II generation of students who regularly practiced the Brooks-and-Warren method of close analysis, we could talk about the linguistic features of a poem with great specificity. Yet we may well have been stymied when we wanted to talk about the linguistic features of a prose text.

-Edward P.J. Corbett, "Teaching Style"

The first edition's organization provides a starting point from which Brooks and Warren adapt and diversify the pedagogical points they wish to emphasize. In this first edition, the structure is predictable: selections are organized thematically and most of the questions that follow each selection focus on content. The editors do encourage dialogue between the readings, often asking students to compare two essays or points of view. But by and large the apparatus in this first edition remains – like the authors' definition of the essay, itself – focused on the facts. Typical questions revolve around what Author X says about Subject Y or how a student would define the essay's key words or concepts.

There are two exceptions worth noting in the first edition's pedagogical focus on "what" based questions. The first is a question in relation to Montaigne's "Of the Resemblance of Children to Their Fathers" which asks: "Does this essay have any formal structure or is it merely haphazard? If it has a structure, what determines that structure?" (195). Attentive students will remember similar language from the Introduction to the Essay and thus assume that the question leads them away from the "haphazard" and toward finding a meaningful logic for the essay's organization. The second exception to the apparatus' paucity of questions beyond content also raises the question of style, here in response to Arnold Bennett's piece "Literary Taste: How to Form It" (one of the few initial essays that disappears from the textbook by the revised edition.) Here the authors ask, "What does Bennett say is the relation of style to content?" (206). Although this question might get students thinking about this relationship, the

question itself relies on students reporting the “fact” of the text without necessarily needing to engage the connection Bennett makes. Other than the question regarding Montaigne’s formal structure then, the guiding pedagogical principles of this first edition remain grounded in identification, comprehension, classification, and straightforward questions about the soundness or fairness of particular arguments.

2.3.1 *Revised Edition, 1944*

Although the revised edition’s “Introduction” to the essay remains exactly the same as the original edition’s text, significant changes emerge in the pedagogical apparatus which signify Brooks’ and Warren’s attempt to supplement their theories of the essay and the ways they ask students to read and interact with essays. A key new feature is a series of several paragraph long discussions that follow new essay selections. In these responses, which precede the set of questions, the authors seize the opportunity to highlight specific features of the essay selection, draw connections between essays, and discuss the more challenging essays which do not fit neatly into the paradigm of a “closely knit, logical development” (133.) In addition to the authors’ discussion of the essay, each selection is followed by five to eight questions which much more thoroughly attempt to engage students in the work of textual criticism (as compared to the typical two to three questions following each selection in the first edition.)

Many of these questions enact similar work as that described above, although in this edition the student is called upon more frequently to explain differences in authors’ arguments and to lend their own views to the discussion.¹ However, despite more rigorous discussion of essays and more thorough question sets, the pedagogical impulse might still be described as somewhat mixed. This edition constantly raises style – such as in the exposition following Emerson’s essay – but then retreats to the

¹ A telling example of this appears in one of the questions following “Self-Reliance,” which asks students to return to the essay and reevaluate it in light of other essays since, the authors claim, “an essay of this type cannot be studied in a vacuum but should call into play the student’s own opinions and all of the information which he can acquire” (133). Such directives question the perception that new criticism consistently worked to elide both readers and history. Another pertinent example in the third edition seems to tackle this charge head on when it asks, parenthetically, “If this question seems unfairly put in that it neglects that situation out of which Emerson speaks and the unstated assumptions of Emerson and his society, what were some of the relevant assumptions?” (556).

“examination of ideas” as the best way for the student to explain the essay’s work. This tension results in a muddled question like: “Even an evaluation of Emerson’s style – if style is functionally related to the author’s purpose – will be impossible, finally, without a broad basis of comparison. In general, this statement applies to all the essays; we can evaluate the style only in terms of the general intention” (133). It’s difficult to tell what to make of this statement, just as it’s difficult to tell what action students are supposed to take in response.

But in addition to these confusing questions, there is also a first attempt to delve more deeply into style. For example, after reading Arnold’s essay “Culture and Anarchy” students are asked to pay attention to “Arnold’s method of presentation and argument. What has he gained by his special ordering of the ideas which he has used?” as well as to attend to Arnold’s use of examples and metaphors/similes and to justify how these elements assist or detract from the essay’s persuasiveness. The last question turns explicitly to style: “Consider, for example, the difference in style between the concluding paragraphs of the essay, and, say, the section on Puritanism and the Nonconformists. What accounts for this difference?” (167). Although the phrasing of the question gives the appearance of haphazardly selecting two sections to compare, the types of questions on Arnold’s essay pave the way for ensuing editions of the text to attend to more than content.

2.3.2 Third Edition, 1952

Although little changes between the revised second edition and the 1952 third edition, a few changes begun in the revised edition begin to come to fruition. The third edition elaborates the questions around style and investigates the taxonomy created between types of essays in a more substantive manner. Brooks and Warren point out differences between the “perceptible logic” which marks argumentative essays and the characteristics that mark personal essays in which “the organization and the tone are more complex – and in a sense, more important” (591). This edition contains a new synopsis of what the authors perceive as key differences between these essays:

[the personal essay] tends to emphasize attitudes and moods rather than a process of logical exposition; and consequently, it characteristically uses a great deal of concrete illustration, imagery, narrative, etc. In its extreme form, as a matter of fact, this type of the essay may seem to be little more than a presentation of the author's personal prejudices and whimsies. (591)

This new explanation moves beyond the organization and tone mentioned in the first part of the discussion to more adeptly describe the form and structure of the personal essay, including its emphases, devices, approach, and movement. Additionally, the editors introduce a spectrum of essay-writing– from formal to informal and from more extreme forms of each to less extreme forms – alongside the spectrum of essay readers who, the authors seem to hope, are as stable as the taxonomy they offer and thus able to perceive the logic and complexities of these multiple essays.

These developments play out more fully in the textbook's apparatus, where new questions more explicitly address the role of the reader and the elements of style. Brooks and Warren first pay more attention to how the reader is figured in the essay as well as the tone the essay establishes in relation to the reader by asking questions such as:

- What is the tone of the essay? What do the allusions and quotations used by Lamb tell us of his attitude toward the reader? On what terms does he stand with the reader? What kind of reader does he envision?
- To whom is this essay addressed? The author writes: "We have forgotten, etc." Who is we? What is the tone of the essay?

The stylistic questions are also further developed, as seen below:

- How would you describe the style of this essay? The first paragraph, for example, has a number of echoes from the King James version of the bible. (Can you point them out?) In what other ways is the style "literary"? Compare and contrast it with the style of Hemingway, of Bishop, and of Lamb in his informal essay, "Old China."
- Is there any difference in style between Churchill writing as a historian and Churchill speaking as an orator? In this connection, consider very carefully the style of the last paragraph.

- As a historian, Churchill is necessarily interested in giving facts – precise dates, places, even tables of statistics. Does he manage to make his facts “come alive”? Does it succeed in presenting the dramatic excitement as felt by himself and the British people? If so, how has he done this? Consider carefully the diction, the comparisons, and the rhythms of the relevant passages.
- What is the function of the French quotations? Thurber sometimes translates the relevant passages. Would anything be lost if he used no quotations in French at all?

Instructed by the precise directive to consider specific words and sentences, students are called on to describe how textual elements work together to achieve a particular tone, style, and overall effect.

Moreover, in the final question students are asked to pay attention to the intricate ways the text is constructed by considering how the text might change if it were missing one or more of its elements.

Here, the reader is actively engaging the features of the text and the more precise set of questions Brooks and Warren pose to get students thinking about the effects of style. Despite other large-scale changes to the next edition, this particular attention to students engaging style is developed further in the fourth edition of *An Approach to Literature*.

2.3.3 Fourth Edition, 1964

The fourth edition, the last edition to include essays as part of the textbook, is indicative of many of the changes Brooks and Warren struggled to develop in relationship to the essay. The major theoretical change that marks the fourth edition is the new category of Discursive Prose which now substantially reorganizes the section on the essay. The rubric of “Discursive Prose” now combines four categories – the personal essay, the essay of idea and opinion, the critical essay, and biography. Surveying textbooks just prior to this period (1956-1960), Richard M. Eastman writes that the genre of prose non-fiction “is virtually confined to the freshman course” and thus to the texts and anthologies marketed toward this course (221). This re-organization seeks to align these forms of writing more squarely within the bounds

of the modes of discourse – narration, persuasion, exposition, and description – that, as we will see shortly, *Modern Rhetoric* relied on throughout editions.

The change of *Approach*'s overall heading to Discursive Prose also indicates larger theoretical shifts within the text.² The fourth edition is more grounded in rhetorical purpose, a point emphasized at the beginning of each subsection through a discussion of the “occasion” to which writers respond (whether writing a personal essay, an essay of idea, a fictional story, etc.) The fact that these genres are united through a stronger focus on occasion seems to complicate the division between literary/belletristic writing and utilitarian writing which seemed to underlie earlier editions of the textbook. The rhetorical charge of this edition also pressures form and style as merely aesthetic categories, focusing instead on the connection of style and structure to “the writers’ concern for precision and expressiveness in his exploration and discrimination of meanings” (432).

Dovetailing with the tenor of these changes, the pedagogical apparatus also develops in the fourth edition in three important ways. First, the authors finally return to some of their key essays that have appeared throughout earlier editions. Although Brooks and Warren seem to typically innovate the apparatus around new readings, this edition presents a productive expansion of questions which have seen only small modifications across several decades. To me, this illustrates an injection of reflective pedagogy that extends across both new and old selections alike. The result is a more comprehensive and consistent method across the textbook. This more even development of the apparatus also allows a new type of second order question to surface where students are asked to not only pinpoint and describe the multiple styles used by a single author, but to also take into account the type of analysis used to make

² As Clarence L. Kulisheck noted in a 1954 article for *The Journal of Higher Education*, textbooks such as *An Approach to Literature* furthered a “genre-approach in preference to the period or chronological approach,” resulting in a curricular seachange as well: many liberal-arts colleges “completely revised...their curricular offerings...on an exclusively genre basis” (177). This genre approach then fed back into the system. Textbooks de-emphasized particular strands or types of literature in favor of broader generic categories; Kulisheck mentions the change from Romantic or Victorian poetry to “the poem” and “readings for opinion” or “ideas in prose,” now all under the rubric of “essay” (177). Inherent in these changes, Kulisheck notes a shift toward “popular consumption,” an observation that acknowledges the influence of new critical pedagogies via textbooks as well as the impetus of these texts to widen the study of literature to students in democratic, not authoritative, fashion. For more on the ways that Kulisheck understands new critical textbooks as determining a new literary canon through its particular selections see “The New Criticism and the New College Text.”

judgments about style. Second, even more questions emerge that ask students to pay attention to specific stylistic and structural moments and to discuss the efficacy of stylistic choices. And lastly, there is a new pedagogical development as students are now given the opportunity to respond to the readings by generating their own sets of questions and by making their own pertinent comparisons between essays.

By way of conclusion, three points are worth noticing in the *Approach to Literature* series. First, the fourth edition is more grounded in rhetorical purpose, a shift which seems to allow Brooks and Warren to expand their language for and attention to the elements of style in writing, especially through developing the exercise questions more richly. Connected to this development, is the way that the comparison of four editions illustrates how the editors progressively grappled with essayistic style and how to engage students in thinking about style outside the realms of either fiction or poetry. Although these developments do not occur in the central theoretical discussion of the essay, the pedagogical approach to essays shifts substantially and productively. Finally, by the fourth edition students were increasingly encouraged to pursue their own inquiries and generate critical answers to complex textual questions. Imagined as careful readers who could make a case for what they noticed in texts, students were asked to become more focused and precise in terms of both responding to stylistic questions and in making connections and differentiations across genres.

By paying more attention to particular uses of structure and style in a wider array of essay selections, Brooks' and Warren's fourth edition therefore illustrates the growth of the seeds planted in the earlier editions. Although a few of the questions still contain some outmoded vestiges of earlier editions – such as a focus on discerning the “personality” of the author via the text – and despite the fact that the rubric of clarity is often used to explain stylistic choices, the fourth edition of *An Approach to Literature* shows an emphasis on pedagogical development and a trajectory of growth in attending to essayistic style, if only through the pedagogical apparatus.³ For Brooks and Warren, the essay was a decidedly practical

³ Although Brooks and Warren complicate the way we might usually think of clarity by writing that clarity is the way a particular text explores and makes its subject clear (it is thus not connected to whether or not we perceive the text as

and critical problem, although not one uninteresting from their pedagogical perspective. Over the course of several editions the essay became a critical site – at least within classrooms – where teachers read essays alongside their students and both could practice finding language to discuss what they found. With each edition there was more to say, more to consider, and more attention to be paid to essays, their construction, and how their style mattered rhetorically. Indeed, the shift toward a more generally rhetorical emphasis seemed to support these inquiries. Likewise, as each new edition of *Approach* was revised, what students were asked to do and the types of readers they were asked to become shifted and developed as well. Students were encouraged to become more capable of pursuing their own inquiries and more competent at generating critical answers to complex textual questions. As we will see in the next section, however, the pedagogies for reading essays would eventually differ markedly from the pedagogies aimed at students writing their own essays, despite initial overlaps in approach.

2.4 THE SHIFTING RHETORICS OF FORM AND STYLE: WRITING IN ACTION IN *MODERN RHETORIC*

Ever since word got out that *Modern Rhetoric* was in the making, teachers of composition have felt more than an ordinary interest in the project. Each of the authors was a commanding figure: Cleanth Brooks as one of the lawgivers of the New Criticism and Robert Penn Warren as a Pulitzer Prize novelist. Nothing commonplace could issue from such a collaboration.

-*College English*, 1950 Review

Brooks and Warren released the first edition of *Modern Rhetoric* in 1949, over a decade after their first two major textbooks appeared and just a few years before the 3rd edition of *An Approach to Literature*.⁴

straightforward or clear), this emphasis muddies the productive trajectory of the introduction to the essay. For if the student is to grapple with form and style and why differences in either matter, it seems to me that thinking through these issues under the auspices of determining “the problems of what constitutes the appropriate clarity” might limit the student’s patience in grappling with a textual form that is not immediately clear. For an alternate view on style – style as pleasure and not as clarity – Richard Lanham’s body of work is helpful.

⁴ A shorter version of the text, entitled *Fundamentals of Good Writing*, was also published by Harcourt Brace and was released in 1950.

Although *Modern Rhetoric* never reached the popularity of textbooks such as *Writing with a Purpose* or the *Harbrace Handbook*, reviews such as those written by Lyle Kendall nonetheless asserted the significant force of *Modern Rhetoric* as “long since eminent as a full course in freshmen English...because of its extended, almost encyclopedic nature” (252).⁵ The text begins with the assertion, “The authors of this book know that there is no short cut to the teaching of composition” and proceeds by stating that, despite their conventional layout and rhetorical underpinnings, the authors have tried to modernize the text and “garner for composition some of the fruits of this revived interest in rhetorical techniques” that pertain to reading practices (xiii).

Most of these “modern” approaches appear in the structuring of questions for students. Brooks and Warren focus on both specific passages which allow the student to study examples of style and the workings of language, and full essays and “Readings” which present such particulars in their “whole contexts” (xiv-xvi). In response to the range of excerpted readings, the authors provide exercises for the student that break writing into elements which are, by their description, both prescriptive and suggestive. Finally, the editors clearly value the interpenetrating processes of writing and reading, positioning their combination of readings, discussion, and exercises about writing as constituting the “integral part of the ‘method’ of this book” (xvi). It is important to note, however, that the essays included in the readings section do not contain explicit questions in response.⁶ Since I have charted the authors’ relationship to the essay by examining such reading-response exercises in *An Approach to Literature*, I here turn to three methods for assessing the broader epistemologies and pedagogies that underwrite *Modern Rhetoric*. For each edition, I examine the shifting theoretical positions concerning acts of writing, the differing

⁵ See Harvey S. Wiener’s “Selecting the Freshman Textbook” for approximate statistics of copies sold. Despite their popularity, Wiener argues that the texts by McCrimmon and Harbrace were nonetheless inappropriate for the Open Admissions context. Wiener’s views, however, seem to come from a hyperbolized sense of student under-preparedness.

⁶ There is a partial exception to the lack of questions regarding readings in the initial edition of the text. Here, questions which refer to the readings are embedded throughout the text; page numbers of pertinent questions are thus mentioned at the end of each essay. In general, these questions are useful and provocative despite the somewhat cumbersome layout.

relationships they construct to student writing, and finally, the attention paid to style in terms of students composing their own writing.

Given that Brooks' and Warren's composition textbook is, however, a classically oriented rhetoric complete with sections on logical deduction and organized via the modes of discourse, it is not surprising that the personal essay, as I have been describing it in preceding chapters, is not the focal point.⁷ Students are not directly invited to write essays, although they are instructed to write themes, research papers, critical papers, the précis, book reports, logical deductions, and the like, depending on the edition and the perceived demands schools were making of students at the time. Despite the fact that students are asked to read, but not write essays, I suggest the extent to which the writing students are asked to do can develop an essayistic quality. For Brooks and Warren, it seems that an essayistic quality may be at least partially constructed by attention to style and through reading essays alongside practicing composition. However, as I will illustrate below, over the course of the first several editions the authors generate a productive understanding of both composition and students situation between acts of writing and reading only to shut down these possibilities in the fourth and final edition.

2.4.1 *First Edition, 1949*

The first, much anticipated edition is noticeably more abstract and theoretical in its presentation of what comes to be called the "Special Problems of Discourse" in later editions. These "problems" – style, diction, metaphor, and tone – are most fully discussed in this first edition. Moreover, abundant exercises instruct students to not only compare and describe particular styles and tones, but to practice shaping sample selections of their writing (or their imitations of others' writing) to explore a range of stylistic and tonal possibilities. Students are asked to think a good deal about the tones that can shape an essay and to

⁷ As Robert Connors points out in the "Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse," the modes as they were presented in textbooks by Alexander Bain and John Genung "sounded the death knell of the belletristic classification" in which the Essay played a considerable part (the most popular constellation being Letters, Treatises, Essays, Biographies, and Fiction) (446-7). Since Brooks and Warren use the modes to organize each edition, it comes as no surprise that the essay as I've characterized it does not appear.

pinpoint – on the level of the sentence – how those tones are achieved. Many of the examples of personal essays – in the longer readings and in shorter excerpts – intersect with those in *An Approach to Literature*; likewise, the questions in response may be said to echo several of those that appear in the third edition (1952) of that textbook.

In the first edition of *Modern Rhetoric* Brooks and Warren delineate the forces that shape style as:

First, and most important, there is style as shaped by the writer's specific purpose – the choice and arrangement of words as determined by the audience addressed and the purpose at hand. Second, we have style as shaped by the writer's general environment...[as in] a manner of writing characteristic of a whole age...Third, we have style as shaped by the writer's own personality.⁸ (330-1)

What we might recognize as rhetorical, contextual, and expressivist understandings of style, thus combine, the authors argue, at the level of the sentence via the rhythms of the writing.⁹ Students are instructed to map rhythmic patterns in similar ways to poetic scansion; students are then asked to rewrite particular sentences and paragraphs to achieve a clearer or more effective rhythm. After such practice, apparatus exercises then ask students to both pay attention to particular stylistic problems or choices as well as to reflect on the larger implications of style in communication. Some examples include:

- Does the element in question do its particular job in the expressive pattern of the whole?
- Can you rewrite the sentences so as to bring them into accord with the style of the first three and the last two? Consider diction and tone particularly. Etc.....
- For example, what is gained by writing “a large percentage” rather than “many”?

⁸ For more on Brooks' and Warren's understanding of the interrelation of style and personality, including characterizations of famous writers' personalities evidenced in their style (Dickens as overly sentimental, James as illustrating a keen intellect sifting through the experiences of the world) see especially pages 504-521.

⁹ It is important to note that despite the rhetorical emphasis here, Brooks and Warren consistently value the student's ability to find his or her “true subject,” a task which is accomplished by a “searching” of the writer's thoughts and feelings. Although the “true subject” and, indeed, the style of writing are related to the writer's personality in the view of the authors, they are at pains to acknowledge that “the self” is difficult to know, especially in writing, and is gained through processes of “exploration, and perhaps painful experiment” (504). Although this admission seems to present a somewhat malleable, constructed sense of self, other statements by Brooks and Warren make evident their Romantic underpinnings, as well as the traits they value in writing. Although too lengthy to discuss here, one sentence might serve as an example: “Individuality in style is important, then, not because it is valuable in itself, but as a symptom of the presence of something else: genuineness” (505).

- In comparing them, we are inclined to say that they differ merely in “style.” But does not the difference in style carry with it a difference in content? What is the difference between what each version “says”? If Smith’s version is to be preferred, try to indicate why, making special reference to his choice of diction, sentence structure, rhythm, and any other elements of style that seem relevant.

As seen here, the first edition of *Modern Rhetoric* aims to discuss and engage difficult issues in writing with students through attention to specific sentences. A chapter entitled “The Final Integration” aims to synthesize the work of earlier chapters on diction, tone, metaphor, and style and ends with six full pages of exercises that supplement the several pages of exercises following chapter subsections. Finally, the concluding selection of Readings is preceded by a lengthy, colloquial discussion of how reading and writing support one another. In many ways, then, this first endeavor into composition was a success for the textbook duo and was well received, the primary critique being only that Brooks and Warren believed students to be “more capable” than they were.

A 1950 review of *Modern Rhetoric* in *College English* provides the context for such critiques. Here, reviewer Ernest Samuels (Northwestern) compares the Brooks and Warren textbook to another contemporary composition textbook: *Understanding and Using English* (Newman and Genevieve Birk). Samuels frames his review by addressing to what extent each of these textbooks is able to “face up to” the “intolerable burden which the Freshman English class is being made to carry,” the demands of which include:

to introduce the student to the nature of language, train him in analytical reading of literary and nonliterary material, build up his vocabulary, mend his spelling, improve his speech, speed up his reading, make him a clear thinker, and, finally, a socially conscious writer... (55).

Whereas Birk and Birk “do not quarrel with their burden,” trying to attack each of these fronts as best they can, Brooks and Warren “cut the knot by limiting themselves to rhetoric and the rudiments of logic and rejecting the usual service demands” (55). According to Samuels, the result is that the Birks and Birks textbook spreads itself too thin and thus proves to be too elementary in many ways – it lacks the

“rich substance” *Modern Rhetoric* provides (55). However, Samuels goes on to suggest that because Brooks and Warren construct such a specific text, it has the danger of being read as “esoteric doctrine” by a good number of students (54-5).

By laying out the “continuing crisis – or confusion – in the teaching of Freshman English,” Samuels provides a clear pedagogical and professional backdrop against which to read Brooks’ and Warren’s foray into the field of composition. The lynchpin of this backdrop is the amount of training composition teachers have had, particularly in relation to the exploding university populations. Thus, whereas Birk and Birk’s text is “obviously written by practicing freshmen English teachers for the mass freshmen of 1950...and directs its primary attention to the immediate writing needs of the student. Even an inexperienced instructor may be trusted with this text, for the authors seem to have him in mind as well as the ill-prepared student,” Samuels describes *Modern Rhetoric* this way:

As a guide to the technical principles of elementary rhetoric and elementary logic, the book has very real merit, and it should give to a course in composition a coherence and intellectual rigor that is often lacking. But it is clearly not a text that will teach itself. In all fairness it ought to be used with the same close application that is commonly reserved for laboratories in science, which it somewhat resembles in its systematic methods. To the better-than-average student, especially in the second semester of the freshman course, or to the student in a sophomore composition course it offers a rational program for attaining a good prose style. (54-5)¹⁰

This analysis grounded in the teachability of the text is suggestive for both what it reveals about how Brooks and Warren imagined composition students – as more capable than students were typically imagined at the time – as well as how they imagined their role in supporting teachers. Such reviews, as we will see, likely had much to do with the changes made between the first edition of Brooks’ and Warren’s *Rhetoric* and the second.

¹⁰ By way of note, Samuels conclusion in relation to the varying levels of difficulty of these two textbooks is to “separate the strong from the weak” giving to each group of students “the textbook fitted to its capacities” (55).

2.4.2 *Second Edition, 1958*

In the eight years that passed between the first edition of 1949 and the second edition of 1958, a number of changes were made that suggest mixed responses to the pressures of teaching writing. The editors write that they made the book “more practical for classroom use,” by including more student themes, a chapter on usage and grammar, more variety in “subject matter and tone” in their provided set of Readings, and new exercises that “provide the student with more specific and attractive invitations to develop his own skill” (ix). Despite these “practical changes,” however, the revised edition seems to implicitly address precisely such comments which suggested that the editors trusted too much in the sentence-level skills of their students (and perhaps their teachers’ training in those matters as well.) The revised edition was therefore embraced by those reviewers and teachers anxious to have a straightforward textbook; they responded to the new organization of the textbook – including the new full chapter on the Research Paper – which seemed to more clearly privilege categories of (school) writing. Whereas the first edition ends with the rich array of interactive exercises around style and tone, the second edition finishes with the elaborate Research Paper chapter and appends a Handbook of Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics (including a section on the Book Report.)

The table below offers a comparison of the changes made between editions and illustrates the shift away from discussing style:

Table 1: Comparison of First and Second Editions, *Modern Rhetoric*

First Edition (1949)	Second Edition (1958)
48 pages on the paragraph and the sentence	➤ 28 pages on the paragraph and the sentence
6 page separate chapter on <i>style</i>	➤ 1 page on <i>style</i> , buried within “Tone” chapter
Style defined in its own chapter	➤ Style defined parenthetically
7 pages on <i>rhythm</i>	➤ 3 ½ pages on <i>rhythm</i>
36 page chapter - “The Final Integration”	➤ 4 page vestige subsumed in “Tone” chapter
23 pages of <i>style and tone exercises</i>	➤ 9 pages of <i>style and tone exercises</i>
2 lengthy chapters on tone and style precede Readings	➤ Chapter on Research Paper precedes Readings

As this chart illustrates, Brooks and Warren spend a good deal of time defining style in the first edition, whereas in the second edition style is defined in a parenthetical aside as the “how” of writing (375). Although the language used to describe and explore style in the first edition was occasionally clumsy, the second edition jettisons entire sections, suggesting a radical simplification of what students *should* be taught (and thus implicitly, what they are thought to be capable of learning.) Contrary to the idea the authors express in the literature-based textbooks – that form and style are necessary to understand the meaning of the writing and how it works – the trend in the second edition of *Modern Rhetoric* is to minimize rather than stress these connections

These changes are certainly related to demands to refashion the composition textbook in order to more adequately serve (and/or shape) the composition classroom, a motive the authors themselves suggest. The changes to the second edition may well serve the multiple purposes of the composition classroom through its embodiment as writing manual, exercise book, grammar handbook, and reader. Yet what results from this change is a complex shift in terms of how both reading and writing are presented and, thus, perceived. In the first edition, reading and writing are closely linked as necessary

complements. Textual examples are used frequently and are drawn from well-known authors and literary fiction and non-fiction; students are given more opportunities to practice reading, responding to, imitating, and rewriting prose. In the second edition, however, reading selections are no longer followed by the page numbers which reference embedded questions pertaining to that reading selection. This alone results in a less integrated text and seems to position the parts of the textbook as nearly distinct Rhetoric and Reader. Moreover, the lengthy Introduction to the Readings has been shortened from ten pages to three pages. Accordingly, the set of questions students should remember - concerning the theme of the work, the motive of the author, and the overall “enlightenment” of the piece in its effects – is now foregrounded as the central practical apparatus and the focus of the Introduction. These factors, combined with the tone and broader procedure of the text, allow a wider audience for the first edition – readers and writers who may or may not be in school but who are interested in the processes of both reading and writing. In contrast and as evidenced above, the second edition formulates its audience more precisely in terms of the composition student.

A single positive development in the changes from first to second edition of *Modern Rhetoric* occurs in the new section on writing the Research Paper. In addition to mentioning rewriting as a necessary part of the writing process, a subsection entitled “Writing the Paper” maps the production of a student paper from initial draft, to a clarifying sentence outline, to a revised draft. For the first time in *Modern Rhetoric* student writing is included as a text that should be “read” and studied. The section includes revisions the student apparently made, particularly on the paragraph level, and the application exercises ask students to suggest other revisions. These modifications suggest the beginnings of student writing as valued textual material, as well as a pedagogical approach more grounded in revision and interaction with student writing – changes that will be productively expanded in the following edition.

2.4.3 Third Edition, 1970

Perhaps in response to the critiques in reviews, the third edition aims to repair some of these severed connections. In the third edition, the discussion of style is invigorated somewhat from the second edition and treated more directly as well. The section on style, although still quite short at two pages, now begins this way:

The reader of this text may be surprised to find that the term *style* is now appearing for the first time. He might have well expected a long discussion of style much earlier in the book. But though the term is mentioned here for the first time, actually, from the very first page of the book, we have been discussing style. The plan for conducting an argument or presenting a piece of exposition, the means for connecting paragraph with paragraph, the choice of diction, the handling of tone – all are aspects of style. (497)

Instead of the second edition's parenthetical definition of style and its overwhelming and intimidating beginning that read "the real difficulty in discussing style comes out at this point," the editors ground style in many of the elements of writing students have already been practicing. In a new way of acknowledging that style is difficult, they do not pose it as impossible, but again situate it rhetorically:

So far in this chapter we have seen how difficult it is to isolate and determine the specific value of each of the factors that control tone and rhythm. And it would be much more difficult to accomplish this with respect to style in general, which is a larger concept and represents the interplay of all sorts of elements, including tone and rhythm themselves. There is no one proper shape for a sentence or length for a paragraph nor one "correct" diction. The "correctness" will depend on the occasion and the writer's purpose and the context in which the word or sentence is placed....style itself is a harmonious interplay of all the elements and devices of writing. (498)

In their attempts to clarify the role that style plays in writing, Brooks and Warren have somewhat surprisingly returned to the language of the first edition of *Modern Rhetoric*. The authors thus continue

to negotiate how to effectively talk about style in ways that are practical and useful to student understanding. Although questions of style and opportunities for students to describe and practice different stylistics were pretty sharply curtailed in the second edition, here the reinvigorated and more direct attention to style is mirrored by an increase in exercises on style; in addition to reworking many of the exercises and punctuating subsections with additional exercises, the third edition contains four new pages of exercises on style at the end of the chapter.

This enhanced attention to style is mirrored in the third edition's increased attention to student writing. Here, Brooks and Warren provide two complete student papers, describe the changes the student made across several drafts, and provide a lengthy narrative that unfolds around the student Susan and her attempts to write her critical paper on Yeats. Readers follow Susan through a process of researching her topic, brainstorming her argument and organizing her ideas, and writing a first draft. The editors then simulate a discussion between Susan and her roommate, Jane, about the paper. Although a bit artificial, the scene does dramatize a thoughtful peer's response to student writing.

Moreover, this section is followed by three full pages that "look at a few of the specific problems that Susan uncovered and follow her line of reasoning as she uncovered them" (558). Susan's revised outline and a revised draft of her paper in full then follow, accompanied by marginal comments and an end comment by the (simulated) instructor. Here the editors have intensified the reflexive quality of the application exercises, putting students more thoroughly in dialogue with the revisions made to the sample student writing papers as well as asking students to respond to the comments the editors offer. Compared to earlier editions, the third edition offers the most robust opportunities for students to grapple revision via questions such as:

- Do you agree with the instructor's comment? Has he been too generous with Susan? Do you find difficulties in the revised paper that he has not noted? Has he, on the other hand, failed to mention features of this paper that you think have merit?
- Make a detailed examination of the differences between the original and the revised forms of this paper. Make your own notes on the significance of Susan's various revisions, and if you think that sometimes her revisions are for the worse, indicate why you think so.

- Do you think that Susan was right to exclude her paragraph 13 of her first draft from the revised paper? Indicate why or why not.

By asking such questions, the third edition returns to the valuing of style and the intense student interaction with texts we saw in the first edition, as well as developing a more nuanced apparatus for discussing invention, revision, and student writing. In short, students are asked to be more involved in ascertaining and describing specific revisions as well as other possibilities for revision. It is in this edition, therefore, that we see the editors' attention to style and their attention to student writing and revision begin to most fully dovetail and support one another.

2.4.4 Fourth Edition, 1979

This success, however, is short-lived. Unlike *An Approach to Literature*, in which a vocabulary for discussing style and how it matters in a text continued to develop in each subsequent edition, *Modern Rhetoric*'s fourth edition – like the streamlined second edition – illustrates a regressive turn and an overly-reified schematic for writing. Over half of the exercise sets in the “Tone and Other Aspects of Style” have been cut, including some of the most suggestive comparison exercises and the imitation exercises which gave students a direct opportunity to practice writing. Other changes reinforce this schematic. The “Readings” section has been struck entirely and in general the text has been shortened. At least 60 pages have been cut from the sections dealing with paragraphs and sentences, diction, tone and style, and even the large section on the Forms of Discourse has been trimmed by about 160 pages to half its length. The only section which seems to have grown is the final section on note-taking and the research paper. These expanded sections emphasize the processes surrounding the research paper that are still in use today in many high schools (different types of outlines, research recorded in a highly specific manner on note cards, etc.)¹¹

¹¹ Although it does not seem to be the motivating factor in any changes made to *Modern Rhetoric*, since Brooks and Warren seemed compelled to “stake out our line” in this textbook market and adoption decisions most often came

Although the fourth edition makes a point to say that it employs more student papers, the papers which are used are significantly shorter. Thus, as the chart below illustrates, the opportunities for students to puzzle through revisions and try their hand at revision shrinks from 55 pages to 25.

Table 2: Comparison of Third and Fourth Editions, *Modern Rhetoric*

Third Edition (1970)	Fourth Edition (1979)
55 pages of student-writing	➤ 25 pages of student-writing
Investigation model	➤ Replication and success/failure model
Multi-staged invention and revision process	➤ Single drafts produced on demand
Engagement with content and form by students	➤ Analysis of content provided by the editors
Students reflect on composition strategies and effects	➤ No questions for students on compositions

Moreover, the short sample papers are presented as a self-sufficient model; the application prompts that follow merely ask the student to replicate something similar of their own on a slightly different topic.

This pattern intensifies with the new student examples of the Critical Paper. Gone is the extended discussion, the tracing of Susan’s writing and revision process, and the reflective apparatus questions. Instead, Brooks and Warren now provide a short story and a poem with a handful of short student responses to each. It is first important to note that these papers go through no initial process of invention and no revision; they stand as monolithic products apparently produced on demand. Moreover, the papers are juxtaposed in order to illustrate “good” and “bad” papers: the language asserts, for example, that “Debbie succeeds, where Bob and Joan fail” (356). In the analyses, the authors offer only interpretations

after the editions were published, it is important to note that later editions of the *Rhetoric*, especially the fourth, were adopted by high schools in addition to universities (Grimshaw 71).

and examples from the story itself instead of examples from the student papers. Most strikingly, not a single question asks the student to return to the student writing and ascertain how and why it works (or doesn't.) This constitutes a remarkable change from the rich pedagogical apparatus of the third edition.

By way of summary, then, although this fourth edition is more strictly a rhetoric – without readings, without a handbook – it is, compared to the previous editions, the least rhetorical. What I mean to indicate here is that the fourth edition provides students the least opportunity to think about their writing as broadly engaged in a rhetorical situation.¹² There are now few opportunities for students to think about how they're presenting their ideas through language and why it would matter one way or another. Instead, there is a marked shift away from technologies of engaged, revised, and attentive writing practices and a shift toward reading practices that are much more conservative than in *An Approach to Literature*. *Modern Rhetoric* thus proves a highly contradictory text, unable to develop or sustain a consistent trajectory in the face of changing pressures from the field and the market. This limited final edition of the textbook corresponds with the limited view of students the textbook projects: the disappointing result is an impoverished sense of both student-writing and students writing. Indeed, Richard Ohmann's language from "Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language" seems appropriate in conveying the practices of the fourth edition, especially when studied in relationship to the third edition: they "inadvertently suggest to students that they be less inquiring and less intelligent than they are capable of being" (390).

¹² Frank D'Angelo makes a similar point in his historical summary of the field's changes, "Looking for an Object of Study in the 1970's." Writing that until the mid-1970s the forms of discourse guided many popular rhetorics that were perceived as useful by teachers, D'Angelo ultimately concludes that "the forms of discourse represented an unrealistic view of composition, one that presented teachers with a mistaken concept of aims, modes, and forms of discourse that was essentially arhetorical" (55).

2.5 CONCLUSION

In her article, “Constructing Composition,” Libby Miles surveys the historical scholarship on textbooks within the field by writing:

There is also the matter of physical reproduction. In their histories, Brereton, Connors, Crowley (*Methodical*), Hawhee, Kynell, and Winterowd trace particular textbooks that evolve (or not) over time. Despite the twelve year span of their research, all six find that only minor changes mark revisions of the most successful textbooks, and that those frameworks most antithetical to current composition theories are those that persist through editions, reproduced over and over through decades of revisions.... The implication here is that not only do individual textbooks reproduce themselves over time, but they also create a paradigm that is then enacted in competing books. (31-2)

Although several of Miles’ points dovetail with the work established in this chapter, I’ve shown above that even sometimes “minor” revisions create a shifting terrain with regard to the relationships between reading and writing. Much remains the same between various editions of both textbooks, true; yet with Brooks and Warren there is a larger, paradigmatic effect on in terms of the interrelated and refracted ways that one series of textbooks and its ideas bump up against others. The result is several connected, yet competing, paradigms within a larger, developing chronology of thought, criticism, and pedagogy.

As I hope I’ve suggested, it is productive to view this chronology as a series of ongoing negotiations – between cultural pressures and disciplinary desires, between market forces and individual programs of study, between changing perceptions of students and literacy, and across ideological and pedagogical grounds in the fields of composition and literature. Charting these fluctuations over an entire line of a textbook provides nuanced, contextualized, and concrete evidence of both innovation and reification. *Modern Rhetoric* makes this case most clearly - the second edition corrected for the eclectic and abstract first edition, the third edition corrected for the over-correction of the second edition by opening questions of style back up, and the fourth and final edition shut these questions down once and for all. Such a trajectory illustrates, as Mike Rose has contended, the way that textbooks represent “the repository of knowledge on a given subject at a given time” to the broader culture. Here this repository

is specifically inflected by discipline: *An Approach to Literature* generally illustrates a model of pedagogical growth (even as its general taxonomy became more stable and refined), while *Modern Rhetoric* presents a model of uncertainty and instability, swinging wildly from extreme to extreme and ending its line with the most conservative version in its 30 years. As I've shown above, this period from 1936 – 1979 thus illustrates *both* the changing and diverse nature of practices and values regarding students and writing *as well as* how these practices eventually reified into a now familiar binary between these disciplines.

From a historical point of view, the shift away from formalist reading practices was undoubtedly related to the development of writing process movements that emphasized the processes of invention and composition over the final product. Robert J. Connors agrees, contending that as expressive pedagogies rose to the forefront of the composition movement, this school of thought achieved its “great primary act of pedagogical creation/destruction: the wreck of formalism in all its versions” (“Erasure” 123).

Connors describes this jettisoning this way:

Formalism and atomism were huge and inescapable parts of modern composition-rhetoric, and the writing process movement laid down a constant challenge to them from 1960 onward...When you build a set of positions based completely on authenticity and anti-formalism, you cannot easily choose some formalism you will be friends with. (123)

Connors writes to recast the debate around these “formalist” pedagogies not in terms of their lack of success (since they were, in fact, proven demonstrably successful in enriching student written prose), but in terms of the ways that composition, as it strove to define itself, moved away from certain ways of thinking and teaching in order to value other ways.¹³

¹³ Connors presents a familiar context for the establishment of composition programs and contends that the anti-formalists positioned this debate about composition squarely within English in order to distinguish it ideologically from work in such departments as education and the social sciences. Connors' practical example in this article is the erasure of sentence-level pedagogies – such as sentence-combining and imitation exercises students used to develop more complex sentences – “by the gradual but inevitable hardening into disciplinary form of the field of composition studies as a subfield of English studies” (121).

These competing desires and pressures from the broader fields surely account for many of the fluctuations I have traced between editions of the Brooks and Warren textbooks. In terms of literary study, Mark Jancovich's assertion seems apt in light of the editions of *An Approach to Literature* I have examined. He writes that one reason Brooks' and Warren's literature-based textbooks were so immensely influential is that they:

appeared at a time when there was no coherent practice for the teaching of literature *as literature*. Their strength was that they addressed this absence, and presented a series of pedagogical activities which could be used both inside and outside the classroom. More than any other New Critical activity, these text-books were responsible for redefining the object of literary study. They directed attention to the linguistic forms of the text, and defined the terms of reference within which literary studies largely continues to operate. (87)

Jancovich thus positions the development of new critical pedagogies and the ensuing dissemination of new critical theory as a necessary, perhaps inevitable, occurrence given the state of the field at the time. Although a similar phenomenon of uncertainty may be said to have been occurring in the field of composition as well, here the Brooks and Warren textbooks did not fill a clear disciplinary gap through innovation.

To add another layer, Gerald Graff extends the disciplinary context Jancovich provides to the larger situation of the university as a whole, writing:

The new pedagogical concentration on the literary "text itself" was designed to counteract the large problems of cultural fragmentation, historical discontinuity, and student alienation. But putting the emphasis on the literary text itself also had a more humble advantage: it seemed a tactic ideally suited to a new, mass student body that could not be depended on to bring to the university any common cultural background – and not just the student body but the new professors as well, who might often be only marginally ahead of the students. (*Professing* 173)

Not only did New Criticism practices thus fulfill a disciplinary need for literary study, but they also sought to support an educational system broadly adrift and dissipating. Even more boldly, the method that was enacted within classrooms strove to extend its mending powers beyond the walls of the academy to the culture at large. This broader unifying impetus was grounded most significantly, as I have shown above, in the pedagogical method the movement offered.

But what about the place of the essay within this alienated and disparate context? The evacuation of discursive prose in the fifth and final edition of *An Approach to Literature* is worth considering given what it illustrates about the place of the essay within the fragmented field of English studies. The new critical emphasis on poetry is no secret. Combined with Warren's obvious focus in fiction, the result is a clear hierarchy from poetry and fiction on down to the more workaday, "fact-oriented" writing here labeled as "discursive." Despite the fact that Brooks and Warren present several essays in most editions which blur the line between fact and fiction, the sentiment the authors maintain toward the essay is clearly seen in a passage such as this:

In the last two generations, the short story....has exploited psychological nuances, delicate shadings of personality and sensibility, and highly personal and sometimes poetic styles. Such writers have, in other words, appealed to the very tastes and interests which the writers of the personal essay once appealed to; and, with the freedom of fiction, they have been able to appeal to these tastes more concretely and variously. (4th ed., 433)

Apparently the essay is dead, overtaken by the short story and the possibility of fiction. For the authors, like a good portion of the reading public, the essay has reached the limit of its capacity. Just as essays continue to be demanded in writing classrooms, the essays in the first four editions are a tradition, an expectation, an unquestioned part of the curriculum perceived as being good for readers (and for writers.) By the fifth edition, however, the value of the essay as even a dose of healthy literary medicine has vanished; the editors justify its marginal status and cut the cord.

The authors' limited approach to prose that cannot be easily categorized is likewise visible in *Modern Rhetoric's* reliance on the modes of discourse. Unlike James McCrimmon's popular *Writing with*

a *Purpose* series which abandoned the “conventional fourfold classification of writing” in favor of a more holistic approach that left the power of deciding the type of writing to the student and her purposes, *Modern Rhetoric* seems to intensify the reliance on the modes of discourse across editions.¹⁴ This is particularly the case in the fourth edition, since most of the other material of the text and the ways it organizes writing – as connected to reading, for example – falls away, leaving the modes as the most significant ordering structure of the textbook. Despite their desire to treat acts of composition seriously, I’ve shown above that Brooks and Warren solidify their writing pedagogy in ways that portray the acts of reading and writing as separate and increasingly mechanical. As the textbook comes to rely more and more upon the modes, jettisoning lengthier discussions and exercises pertaining to tone and style, *Modern Rhetoric* becomes more rule-driven and monolithic. Perhaps this is no surprise given critiques of new criticism in general as conservative, combined with critiques of *Modern Rhetoric* as a significantly less revolutionary textbook than something like *Understanding Poetry*. Even the decision to organize the text according to the modes of discourse is understood, by composition critics such as Robert Connors and literary critics such as Mark Royden Winchell, as a conservative choice.¹⁵ If any semblance of the essay was alive – at least in students’ attention to structure, style, and compositional choices – it has certainly died here as well.

At least for the *Rhetoric*, it is the modes which seem to be the elephant in the room – the method left unquestioned that eventually flattens the more lively interest in style and students and, eventually, becomes an anchor and sinks the textbook and its possibilities. Whether this was due to their lack of involvement in the burgeoning field of composition theory, or other interests and responsibilities (of which we know each author had many) is unclear. But when juxtaposed to the rich and evolving relationships between students and discourse fostered in *An Approach to Literature*, the difference seems

¹⁴ See McCrimmon’s second edition (xi) where the author explicitly addresses this question and argues that, in a purpose-oriented and student-oriented textbook, the modes of discourse as a system of classification are “unnecessary.”

¹⁵ For an additional critique of the modes as they pertain not only to writers but to readers, see Mike Rose, who has argued that the impracticality and unrealistic practice of “viewing discourse in this narrow way” atomizes both the writing process and the product, likely diminishing the chance that a text can foster interest in a reader (69).

to be driven by disciplinary interests and beliefs. *Modern Rhetoric*, when read alongside the reviews and commentary that addressed its revisions, seemed to be responsive to critiques from readers; perhaps this willingness actually spurred Brooks and Warren to be too quick to address criticism and thus to act in ways that were a bit shortsighted within a field that was not their primary area. Remembering that early reviews praised the duo's work with the modes of discourse – particularly since *Modern Rhetoric* fulfilled a desire for this traditional model as other popular textbooks abandoned it and tried other approaches – helps to explain the rapid, conservative changes of the fourth edition (which nonetheless remained true to the taxonomy of the modes.) Given the history that Connors illustrates in “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse,” it is worthwhile to consider how such feedback may have contributed to a reluctance to purge the modes for another approach. If there is a lesson to be learned in Connors account concerning the modes of discourse, it is the extent to which competing textbooks resolutely fall into line in the face of dropping sales.¹⁶ Despite the rise of other textbooks that seemed to challenge the modes as the only successful method of writing instruction, it seems that Brooks and Warren were already too entrenched – or perhaps not interested or knowledgeable enough – to evince a major change of focus.

But if we are not going to be surprised by the final edition's traditional and limited iteration then we must, in fact, be surprised by the short-lived innovations of the third edition. And this emphasizes the above question more directly: what happened after the third edition that produced, in turn, the fourth edition? Did Brooks and Warren retreat from the rapidly changing field of composition in the process of self-definition and entrench their textbooks in what they felt they knew best? From one point of view, it is remarkable that Brooks and Warren attempted, and remained committed to, such a project for over 30 years, particularly when other lines of their textbooks were more influential and more lucrative (the

¹⁶ Connors provides the example of Barrett Wendell, Genung, A.S. Hill, and Fred Newton Scott – what Albert Kitzhaber called “The Big Four” – as testimony to this fact. All except the first had fully adopted the modes as constitutive organizational structures by 1895. Wendell still used his trinity of Unity-Mass-Coherence, but mentioned the modes in his text and did not challenge the model. Connors' telling of A.S. Hill's textbook and its precipitous drop in sales in 1894 due to his refusal to fully adopt the popular new system – and his rebirth in 1895 with a fully revised textbook that embraced the modal system – is a powerful reminder of the extent to which the market determines the organization of knowledge.

Understanding series is the prime example.)¹⁷ Such a commitment, though not necessarily indicative of their interest in the field of composition, surely shows some level of commitment to composition students.

However, just as it is important to remember that Brooks' and Warren's friendship began in a composition-oriented pedagogical situation – the senior Warren looking over one of Brooks' freshman themes – it is likewise important to register the ways their interests departed from that initial encounter. For a while it seems that the editors took their own assertion, “there is no short cut to the teaching of composition” seriously. Eventually, though, their attempts in *Modern Rhetoric* to focus students' stylistic decisions on their own prose (either via the exercises in the first edition or in the questions and working through of the student text in the third edition) stall, despite the ways that this language persists and flourishes in their literature textbooks. Unlike the literature textbooks, the composition textbook flattens out and loses many of its earlier principles which, although perhaps too ambitious, nonetheless provided a rich terrain for students to think about reading and writing as linked activities and thus, potentially, for them to find ways to link their own writing processes and essays to those of published authors.

The way the essay has been presented in the Brooks and Warren texts thus also presents mixed messages. The essay's representation in these literature and composition textbooks marks the arduous struggle to mark, describe, value, and teach the genre. Oscillating between a genre of writing essential to students and an obscure and unnecessary genre easily removed from view, between a form of writing valued in the same literary terms as poetry to a form useful only for the ways it allows students to transport discrete skills to other contexts – the essay's value waxes and wanes according to both the

¹⁷ The representation of *Modern Rhetoric* by James A. Grimshaw, Jr. in his edited collection of correspondence between Brooks and Warren is puzzling. Grimshaw refers to the textbook as the editors' “albatross,” using this word to stand in for two references by Warren within the letters to the “God damned text book.” This phrase is used by Warren as a sign of frustration in light of the many initial tasks needing to be done in the early stages of writing the textbook, and in the difficulty of pinning down a time to work with Brooks in the same state on the project; a similar tone is also used in reference to others textbooks and the many intricacies which need to be managed as the two juggled so many projects. Indeed, there is also much in the correspondence to suggest that both men devoted as much energy to *Modern Rhetoric* as they did to the *Understanding Poetry* series. *Modern Rhetoric* went through an equal number of editions, despite it being, by Warren's account, a book “of less general interest and reputation” as compared to *Understanding Poetry* (223). No doubt this different kind of book presented new challenges; yet the correspondence, itself, suggests that thinking through these challenges provided much of the spirited relationship between the two men as intellectual collaborators.

interests of the editors and the perceived interests of their audiences. The essay briefly achieves literary value in *An Approach to Literature* when it becomes worthy of the question Brooks and Warren consistently pose in relation to poetry: what would be lost if the style and form of this writing was different? Here the essay becomes a literary object as worthy of study as poetry since it, too, becomes “formed” or “made” in particular ways to accomplish and negotiate particular effects (and not just give facts). This perspective extends – if only briefly – from reading practices to the writing practices in *Modern Rhetoric*’s third edition. Here, students are asked to pay attention to how changes in structure, overall form, and style impact the sample student compositions and their own writing. The rich attention the essay warrants in the penultimate editions of both *An Approach to Literature* (4th ed.) and *Modern Rhetoric* (3rd ed.) reaches what I have described as a productive pedagogical height, only to eventually sputter and die.

Given these findings, my investigation of these specific attempts to think about style in the essay is suggestive of the way in which these concepts, historically and in our contemporary context, often remain difficult to grasp, difficult to explain, and difficult to teach. Moreover, the differences I’ve charted between literature and composition textbooks written by the same authors lends support to the unvoiced assumption that questions of style are more appropriate for interpreting the writing of others than they are for the interpretative work of (the student) composing.¹⁸ Noticing how our language for and discussions of style and form may be central in certain spheres, yet become limited or exiled within other practices, is a crucial step in exploring how we might engage our own assumptions and difficulties in teaching form and style as constitutive to meaning. Brooks and Warren provide a clear example of the ways that, as teachers and as theorists, we might often attempt to open language up, testing new possibilities and pedagogies, only to revert back to more comfortable systems or positions. Across the textbooks, style is a

¹⁸ This is also the case in the interactions between *Modern Rhetoric* and *Understanding Poetry*, a key example being that the many formal concerns which are eliminated in the second edition of *Modern Rhetoric* (1958) are yet supplanted into the third edition of *Understanding Poetry* (1960). Clearly negotiating the differences of reading versus writing style, and literature versus composition, remained a central tension across all of the Brooks and Warren textbooks.

key locus of these fluctuations; discussions and exercises about style, like those about the essay, wax and wane; style is and then is not a privileged learning system for both reading and writing texts.

Current scholarship on historical textbooks suggests that historical research such as this is useful not only in unearthing unexplored remnants of the past, then, but also in terms of shifting and revising our contemporary pedagogies. As Carr, Carr, and Schultz write: “Wide-ranging historical research can at times challenge fundamental dispositions toward the field, but more focused or local research, or even chance encounters with an old textbook, can allow a teacher to rethink a moment of instruction to consider anew a familiar term or assignment.” The comparison of these two textbooks, their changes and innovations, and the opposite trajectories they ultimately create thereby offer several useful reminders as we consider our own teaching. There is a positive lesson to be taken from the pedagogical development in *An Approach to Literature* and the third edition of *Modern Rhetoric*: a lesson that encourages us to reinvigorate our teaching via concrete practices and exercises and revising our frequently used materials. In the ways that Brooks and Warren clearly found stylistic exercises interesting and wanted to encourage their students to find it interesting, too, they provide a model of shared intellectual inquiry. However, there is also a lesson in the final edition of *Modern Rhetoric* which became overly reified and mechanical. From my own point of view, I hope to remember the two opposite ways that Brooks and Warren, at particular moments, did not do their students justice: not letting them fully participate in academic study by being too theoretically esoteric, and not believing in students’ abilities enough to let them in on the choices and possibilities that confront them.

Theoretically speaking, this very dichotomy speaks to the larger context of these textbooks as well as the 20th century theories of the essay I have explored thus far. Looking for a way to unite disparate people and their experiences through the text, Brooks and Warren, along with Adorno and Bakhtin, strove toward a more cohesive theory, whether based in radical skepticism, dialogic interaction, or practical pedagogy. Whereas Adorno and Bakhtin grounded their theories explicitly in history, the new critics – faced with an educational tradition which had displaced history into discontinuous and instrumental congeries – responded by swinging too far in the opposite direction of historical

isolationism. As I will show in the next chapter, the relationship between history, culture, and individual reading and writing practices was forcefully taken up in a new way as this period was gasping its last dying breaths. Through a hybridized form of the essay – or as Bakhtin might suggest, a more fully dialogized exploration of the discourses that shape ourselves and our worlds –writers such as Joan Didion, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Edward Said used the essay to reconnect cultural theory, history, the self, and the practices of writing. As I will show in the next chapter, these writers unite theory and practice in order to construct a critical praxis of culturally engaged literacy – a literacy that offers a way forward for those interested in reading, writing, and teaching essays.

3.0 HYBRID SENSIBILITIES AND REFLEXIVE MOVEMENT: WRITING OUR WAY IN

I am both too big and too weak for writing: I am *alongside it*, for writing is always dense, violent, indifferent to the infantile ego which solicits it...I cannot write myself. What, after all, is this “I” who would write himself? Even as he would enter into the writing, the writing would take the wind out of his sails, would render him null and void – futile...

- Roland Barthes, “*Phrase/Sentence*,” *A Lover’s Discourse*

I am an act of kneading, or uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meaning.

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

I begin this chapter with the first epigraph from Roland Barthes to illustrate the way nearly every writer feels at some point in time: that words are “both too much and too little,” “excessive and impoverished,” and that instead of being inside the words (or feeling words easily emerging from “inside”) writers often feel “alongside” the difficult process which is writing. Barthes also suggests that writing necessarily exists where the “I” is not, for no writer can fully control or inhabit their words, particularly when those words reach out to readers. There are other figures (and readers) drawn into the intellectual arena, there are other utterances that interrupt and refract our own, there are expectations and styles in which our words may or may not participate. In this epigraph we see a writer who struggled with the difficulties inherent in writing, even as he valued it in ways similar to the other figures I’ve brought into conversation in this project – Adorno, Bakhtin, and even at moments Brooks and Warren – as a way of coming to know, to discover, and to test and refine thought.

In similar ways, the second epigraph from Gloria Anzaldúa describes the pain and sacrifice of writing and of struggling to make meaning in language. Writing is difficult, fraught, and almost paralyzing at times. Yet the epigraph also describes the positive actions of writing and of questioning old

truths. To knead, to unite, to join has resulted in a “creature of light” in addition to the darkness that she describes; such a unification enables this writer to question the very binary of dark and light, complicating such binaries in order to make “new meaning.” Despite the difficulties these writers (and our students) acknowledge, both Barthes and Anzaldúa stress how writing can both explore and concretize particular ideas and emotions, arguments and moods.

In the previous chapters, I constructed a theoretical and historical framework that repositions the essay and essayistic style as intellectual work. These chapters help create a context for better understanding the directions hybrid essays are taking and why. In the past fifteen years, the personal essay has broadened and changed shape dramatically, moving away from its traditional and generic definition as a testing exploration of any topic united by the presence of a stylistically singular authorial voice enacted in prose. Now making use of multiple genres, mixing languages and forms, and putting pressure on singular subjectivities and ways of knowing, the essays I’m calling “hybrid essays” call into question the assumptions we might hold about what an essay “should” look like. With the rise of creative nonfiction and the increased attention to and acceptance of previously marginalized writers, personal essays – particularly those which take the formation of subjectivity and narratives of literacy as central topics – have become widely anthologized along such canonical essay writers as Thoreau, Woolf, and E.B. White. Beginning in the early moments of post-structuralism and literary post-modernism, and galvanized by feminism, language poetry, and the New Journalism movement, writers such as Roland Barthes, Joan Didion, Gloria Anzaldúa, Edward Said, Susan Griffin, and Adrienne Rich, among others, made visible the generic boundaries of the essay and explored how the already flexible generic conventions of the essay might be productively stretched and reconfigured. These essays have become increasingly popular in schools and textbooks. As such, they demand critical attention to determine what they offer in and of themselves, as well as how they more broadly highlight what I have been calling an essayistic impetus.

Many of the contemporary essayists I cited above composed essays in the time period of the late 1970’s and the 1980’s, not too long after Brooks and Warren had jettisoned prose writing from *An*

Approach to Literature, pronouncing it left in the wake of the modern short story. In *Modern Rhetoric*, the modes of discourse continued to dominate the ways writing was organized and figured. I argued in this second chapter that the fluctuations that pervaded Brooks' and Warren's textbook pedagogies constituted a series of ongoing negotiations between multiple pressures: the cultural and the disciplinary, the market forces driving textbook sales and individual programs of study, and the fields of composition and literature. Similar negotiations mark our contemporary moment. Although it has been clear since Shirley Brice Heath's landmark *Ways with Words* (at least) that multiple literacies must be recognized, and although few teachers contend that first-year composition should be based in the evacuated form of the five-paragraph essay (a very singular literacy practice, indeed), many compositionists do differ on the work the pervasive first-year composition class should pursue.¹ This chapter offers a focused call for a specific type of multi-literate practice – the writing of hybrid essays as intellectual arenas which implicitly contain, and thus allow us to explicitly consider, multiple literacies. (I will extend this argument to consider calls for other types of multiple literacies – multi-modal composition and visual rhetorics – in Chapters Four and Five.)

The goal of this chapter is to therefore enact a version of the “intellectual arena” I have been describing in earlier chapters. To this end, I bring together the voices and compositions of established essayists and public intellectuals alongside those of first-year writing students. As I suggested in Chapter One, students, writers, and intellectuals can meet on common ground through engaging with forms of the essay: both readers and writers participate in a hermeneutics of coming to know through the many forms the essay can take. By entering into dialogue with the ideas of public intellectuals such as Didion and Anzaldúa, students join this intellectual arena and produce their own interventions and continuations, keeping the conversation alive and extending the possibilities for knowledge.

¹ It is necessary to comment that this eschewal of the five-paragraph essay is, in part, a position of academic freedom and luxury. Unlike our equally committed colleagues at the K-12 level, the pressure of standardized assessment tied to remarkable financial and institutional penalties has not yet mandated quantifiable (and thus instrumental and thus commodified) education at the collegiate level. This may not be the case forever.

To model such an intellectual arena, the form of this chapter attempts to construct a choral intellectual arena, particularly in its final section. Part of this choral dynamic will be grounded in a discussion of student writing which takes up the project of “composing identity” and which listens to the reflections students provide in light of these projects. Each text included in this chapter – the published essays, the assignments written in conversation with Didion which often respond directly to student work, and the student essays and responses – suggests the range of knowledge the essay can generate, support, and sustain. In this way, the chapter serves as a practical iteration of the theoretical and pedagogical chapters that have come before, while still preserving a sense of the theoretical possibilities these hybrid essays present.

To clarify, there are at least six levels of hybridity that I will discuss in this chapter:

- discursive (the types of writing and discourse that are called upon in the essay);
- generic (the genres called upon to manage and organize those discourses/types of writing);
- linguistic (the multiple languages that exist and interact within the essay);
- structural (the ways in which these discourses and languages are organized and juxtaposed to one another);
- stylistic (the result, aesthetic and otherwise, of these juxtapositions);
- and, conceptual (the different orders of ideas and the often competing perceptions and representations that coexist within the essay.)

Paying attention to multiple iterations of hybridity is important, I argue, not only to create rich and responsible readings of texts; paying attention to hybrid texts also puts pressure on our understanding of genre as both composed and received, genre as economies of both conventions and expectations.

In my reading of essays by Joan Didion and Gloria Anzaldúa below, I highlight these multiple hybridities and reflect on the ways that students responded and negotiated hybridity in our discussions. I also consider the ways these writers have been anthologized and the ways students have been prompted to write in response to their essays in popular textbook apparatus. Finally, I conclude with a section detailing specific assignments and student work. Here I argue that teaching hybrid essays – focusing student attention on the ways that multiple genres and discourses can occupy a single essayistic text – can open up the following possibilities for students: increased awareness of the functions of genre; increased

attention to rhetorical, discursive, and stylistic choices; a more flexible approach to the essay and to essayistic construction; engaged and critical attention to both “identity” as a subject and the identities that individuals occupy; and, a more substantial intellectual engagement with ideas and the ways they, as writers, choose to present and explore those ideas in writing.

3.1 WRITING THE WORLD: JOAN DIDION

Personal experiences – revised and in other ways redrawn –
become a lens with which to reread and rewrite the cultural
stories into which we are born.

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *now let us shift...*

According to Lynn Bloom’s research regarding the anthologizing of essays, Joan Didion constitutes a “Supernova” – an author whose work has seen over 100 reprints (408). Although her short essay “On Keeping a Notebook” has been anthologized with the most frequency, 30 essays by Didion have been reprinted in 43 anthologies, totaling 219 reprints since 1971 (Bloom, 426). These numbers position Didion as the third most frequently anthologized essay-writer since mid-century.² An essayist, journalist, and novelist writing across several decades, Joan Didion’s writing is oft-cited as adept at capturing particular cultural moments. Perhaps her most powerful essay in this regard is “The White Album,” an essay written throughout the ten-year span of 1968 to 1978. This essay deploys a sectional form, collating a series of reflections and descriptions of both Didion’s personal experiences and those of a broader American society. In the next several pages, I discuss the features that make this essay a hybrid text: the juxtaposition of multiple discourses, the clear separation of multiple types of writing and the

² It is perhaps because of this ubiquity, combined with the journalistic nature of much of Didion’s writing, that few scholarly articles directly connect Didion to the teaching of composition despite her inclusion in so many composition anthologies. By my account, only three articles make this specific connection: Evan Carton’s 1983 “On Going Home: Selfhood in Composition,” W. Ross Winterowd’s 1988 “Rediscovering the Essay,” and John Schilb’s 1989 “Deconstructing Didion: Poststructuralist Rhetorical Theory in the Composition Classroom.” Each essay demonstrates patterns typical of much scholarship concerning Didion: a primary focus on post-modern selfhood and the frequent inclusion of other non-fiction writers thus positioning Didion as rarely the sole subject of study. These patterns are also interestingly evident in the 34 dissertations which have considered Didion’s work; of the 34 less than a third focus primarily on Didion and analyze, instead, from two to five other contemporary writers.

author's reflection on her relationship to this writing, and a sectional form which provides an alternative structure to the essay. I then go on to evaluate assignments which ask students to respond to Didion's essay in order to characterize how students are positioned within these assignments and the work they are imagined to be capable of doing.

"The White Album" begins with the sentence, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live," an appropriate beginning given that the essay complicates the power of narrative to fix or explain reality and thus grapples with the writer's ability to represent what is going on around her. Didion continues:

We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience. (421)³

We ask our students to occupy a place like this, at least for fifteen weeks. We ask them to use writing to impose an order of "ideas" on the world around them in order to make sense of what they experience. Sometimes these are experiences with other texts, sometimes we ask them to turn a critical eye toward their own beliefs or experiences. In both cases, we ask students to juxtapose and put in dialogue "disparate images" in order to explore what "ideas" are at stake.

Yet Didion complicates the above passage in the next paragraph: "Or at least we do for a while. I am talking here about a time when I began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself..." Here Didion notes that the questioning she experiences – the ability to doubt and perhaps challenge "the premises of all the stories" that constitute and shape her life – shifts due to the moment in which she finds herself. When the context for her life alters, her ways of understanding must also change in order to make sense of the world around her and her place within it. This change in the world has the direct effect of necessitating change in the forms Didion uses to express and represent that world – a

³ Page citations are from "The White Album" reprinted in *The Best American Essays of the Century*, edited by Robert Atwan and Joyce Carol Oates.

change in the way she understands the world changes how she uses writing to negotiate that world. She writes:

I was meant to know the plot, but all I knew was what I saw: flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no “meaning” beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting-room experience...Certain of these images did not fit into any narrative I knew. (422-3)

Although this passage ostensibly describes the narrator’s perception of the 1960s, the description accurately illustrates the hybrid and essayistic structure of “The White Album.”

Composed of fifteen numbered sections ranging from a paragraph to five pages in length, Didion’s essay assembles several cultural interactions side by side: the Doors waiting for Morrison to arrive, encounters and interviews with Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton, parties and social conversations, the spread of the news concerning the Tate Murders. Throughout the essay, Didion layers narratives, interviews, events, prayers, lyrics, chants, lists, and conversations, creating a piecemeal essay that reflects both the disparate and conflicted mood at this moment in history and the narrator’s own struggle to fit a narrative onto this series of pieces which don’t quite fit together. Excerpts from the time period come in variable sequence: although loosely chronological, they also oscillate between personal reflection and journalistic reportage. This structure provides a sense of “temporary arrangement...a cutting-room experience” as we sort through the images and pieces of narrative alongside the narrator. In similar fashion, the prose of the essay ranges from the recognizably journalistic – interviews, testimonies, and observations by others – to the intensely personal, including the narrator’s thoughts about being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

Yet the two realms of the personal and the cultural are intimately linked from the beginning of the essay. In the first section, Didion provides “another flash cut” – an excerpt from a psychiatric report, complete with diagnoses, that she later acknowledges as her own diagnosis. After asserting that some of these images “did not fit any narrative,” this longish report is inserted into the text, disrupting the initial section’s introductory nature. The language of the excerpt is elevated and technical, medical and

professional in a way that stands apart tonally as well as visually in its block format. At the end of this first section, the narrator moves to negotiate this seeming disorientation by linking the intimately personal with the cultural and the social: “By way of comment I offer only that an attack of vertigo and nausea does not now seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968” (424). Here, the use of a reflexive discourse allows the narrator to negotiate the multiple types of writing at work and to link the technical, yet personal, discourse with a reflection on how this response was appropriate to the cultural moment at hand.

It is this relationship that students often struggle to negotiate: the essayist’s oscillation between the personal and the cultural and the intimate link that can be forged between the two. Just as it is difficult for the narrator to hold so many disparate pieces of a larger culture in mind in order to make sense of this larger whole, students also experience this difficulty in connecting their experiences to larger structures of significance in their writing. As readers, my students particularly note the feeling of disorientation Didion’s text evokes, a feeling intended to imitate the narrator’s sense of being adrift in a chaotic time and place. Throughout the piece and particularly as the reader moves deeper into the essay – and thus the time period – the reader and the narrator come to exist in a shared sense of the chaotic mood indicative of the 1960s. Experiencing such a textual effect can be frustrating for students who long for a more straightforward and expository text; yet at the same time such a text proves exciting for students eager to have their texts affect their readers in powerful ways. Didion’s essay thus provides an excellent occasion for talking about the reader’s range of possible relationships to the text. Simultaneously Didion’s essay also serves as a site that encourages students to try to pin down how and where the text creates the affects they notice and admire.

The specific value of teaching such an essay to first-year writers is many-fold. From the crafting of sentences to create specific moods and tones, to the suturing together of cultural stories in order to convey a sense of a specific time and its atmosphere, “The White Album” provides rich opportunities to work on building effective sentences and connecting them to create larger effects. Didion’s use of stylistic repetition provides a model for writers learning to write longer, different types of sentences and

offers interesting places to discuss the stylistic use of punctuation and the effect it has on meaning. Likewise, Didion's movement between multiple ways of representing reality – from extremely personal confession to journalistic reportage to a reflexive and reflective summary of events – is particularly helpful in expanding students' ability to recognize and write using a range of expressive and expository techniques.

What I most admire about the piece, however, is Didion's attempt to put discursive pieces together to create a disparate, overwhelming and chaotic whole that is both emblematic of the essay's argument and which nonetheless resists a formation like singular "argument." In this way, her essay questions the power of writing to fully synthesize experience even as it illustrates how writing can help make some kind of sense of the most conflicted experiences. Through strategic use of the hybrid essay, Didion's narrator is able to withhold final judgment of what the 1960's "meant," providing instead an atmospheric rendering open to interpretation. Avoiding too narrow a conclusion, Didion's narrator is able to live in the midst of tensions and indeterminacy while still finding a kind of purchase on the experiences she considers – a writing strategy I am keen to work toward with my students.

Many assignments in the storehouse of anthologies that contain Didion's work, however, take a different approach. Particularly because Didion has several shorter essays – and several which address writing directly – "The White Album" is not the most frequently anthologized essay, as mentioned above. Two very recent textbooks include essays written by Didion: *The Norton Field Guide to Writing, with Readings* (2007) contains both "Grief" and "Georgia O'Keefe" while *The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Creative Non-Fiction* (12th ed., 2008) selects "On Going Home."

In *The Norton Reader* the writing question following "On Going Home," for example, seems based in activity instead of interpretation. The (single) writing prompt reads:

Try keeping a notebook for a week, jotting down the sort of things that Didion does. At the end of the week, take one or two of your entries and expand on them, as Didion does with the entries on Mrs. Minnie S. Brooks and Mrs. Lou Fox. (106)

Such a question does not ask the writer to be in conversation with the model essay – indeed, the writer need have only given Didion’s essay a cursory glance to complete this assignment. Although the text is a reader, it is specifically geared toward college-level composition classes, a place where many students will no doubt view such an assignment as busy work.

Perhaps surprisingly, *The Norton Field Guide to Writing* does not extend the prompts for writing in more productive directions despite its billing as a combined Reader and Rhetoric for first-year writing. In response to each essay, students are asked five questions, only one of which pertains to writing instead of reading. Like the reading questions – which ask students primarily to identify and characterize such features of the text as tone, purpose, contrast, and “dominant impression” – the writing questions are also uni-dimensional. The prompts to “Grief” and “Georgia O’Keefe,” in full, are below:

Grief is a powerful and sometimes surprising emotion. Think about a time when you experienced a strong emotion – such as grief, anger, or elation. Consider how this emotion affected you, and write an essay that **REFLECTS** on this emotion and your experience of it.

Identify someone you know who is an artist, professional or amateur (e.g., a musician, a painter, a quilter, or an actor). **INTERVIEW** that person about the specific art he or she practices. Write a **PROFILE** of the person. (original emphases; 59, 57)

Without even considering whether the style of this text’s typeface is patronizing or aggressive, it is clear that these assignments also take an instrumental approach. Writing is connected to genre (reflection) or to format (profile) but not to larger issues of the self, material and cultural reality, or a larger hermeneutical practice. Indeed, the writing assignment is only tangentially (and simplistically) connected to the essay which supposedly prompted it. Again, students are disappointingly not imagined to be engaged in dialogue with Didion’s essay or the ideas and emotions it explores. They need only reproduce a piece of writing which in some inconsequential and surface way resembles the model they were given.

To explore another contemporary hybrid essayist who is also popularly anthologized, I turn now to a reading of Anzaldúa's two essays "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" and "*Tlilli, Tlapalli* / The Path of the Red and Black Ink." In this section I consider, as I did with Didion, what Anzaldúa's essays offer in terms of writing instruction and how (or if) writing instruction takes up such possibilities. I then add my own assignments and pedagogies to the chorus in the final section of the chapter where I trace my own experience teaching "The White Album" and the hybrid essay.

3.2 WRITING THE SELF: GLORIA ANZALDÚA

...never have the two edges of the seam been clearer and more tenuous, never has pleasure been better offered to the reader...There is also, here, a pleasure of performance: the feat is to sustain the *mimesis* of language (language imitating itself)...

- Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*

What is realized in the novel is the process of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own horizon within someone else's horizon.

- M.M. Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*

Although Gloria Anzaldúa has not yet reached the status of a "Supernova" of anthologized essays as Joan Didion has, her work has been increasingly important for almost two decades and now is systematically anthologized in composition, feminist, and critical race readers. After the publication of *This Bridge Called Our Back*, co-edited with Cherrie Moraga in 1981, Anzaldúa's reach extended with her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* published in 1987. Since then, scholarship surrounding Anzaldúa – as a theorist, a poet, a lesbian feminist, a Chicana, a mestiza – has consistently expanded in order to more fully disseminate and make use of her ideas. In ways similar to Mary Louise Pratt's theory of contact zones which conceptualized the ways that cultures come into contact and conflict through writing, Anzaldúa's writing regarding borderland and mestiza identity offers a socially and politically rich theory

of difference, self, and culture.⁴ Her work has thus been broadly deployed across disciplines in numerous classrooms. In many composition classrooms across the country, students read excerpts or chapters from Anzaldúa's text *Borderlands*; in some of these classrooms, mine included, they write essays similar to Anzaldúa's essayistic, collage-like form in order to understand its interworkings and try their hand at what it might allow. My work below reads two chapters from *Borderlands* – the most often anthologized chapter, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and the seldom anthologized following chapter, “*Tlilli, Tlapalli* / The Path of the Red and Black Ink” – in order to suggest the productive work both popular and overlooked sections can offer writing students.

In a way similar to Didion's “The White Album,” the two Anzaldúa chapters I consider below challenge readers to push against the limits of what they might know about specific contexts and situations. If Didion allows readers to experience the atmosphere and tensions of the 1960's, Anzaldúa allows readers to experience, to some degree at least, what it is like to live in a physically and linguistically “bordered” world. Particularly for the first-year composition students I teach – students often removed in time from Didion's context and removed in space from Anzaldúa's – these texts are situated in specific ways that they often must work hard to engage. Such a process of engagement, however, is useful not only in interpreting these specific texts. Students also learn how to negotiate multiple genres and multiple discourses (and even languages and language usages), testing how these features contribute to the meanings of the essays they both read and write. Working seriously with these essayists also generates a meta-level of discourse in the classroom about what it means to represent realities to readers who might be removed and what kinds of structural forms are best suited to representing issues such as identity.

I've just referred to Anzaldúa's work as essays and so a bit of explanation is therefore in order. Reading Anzaldúa's work broadly, and chapters from *Borderlands* specifically, as essays acknowledges the most significant way that her work has been anthologized and thus the material way her work is

⁴ It is important for this project to note Pratt's linguistic background which enables the use of “contact” to resonate in terms of the socio-linguistic emphases it carried, as in the ways that speakers of different languages negotiate language use and difference for communicative purposes.

presented to many audiences. Her work also demonstrates how the act of writing itself assists individuals in coming to know and express the complexities of identity. It is this ability to explore and investigate – to think in writing – that characterizes Anzaldúa’s writing in these chapters as essayistic. Moreover, because the essay enables oscillation between languages, genres, and ideas, Anzaldúa’s hybrid structure still coheres as an individual essay.⁵ In the two chapters I will examine below, readers see Anzaldúa’s narrator explore the intersections and intricacies of multiple aspects of her identity. Conceptualizing these two chapters as essays allows for several benefits: acknowledgement of the ways that narrator and voice are constructed, attention to how form is crafted and purposeful, and awareness of how the inclusion and negotiation of multiple discourses drives the knowledge possibilities of the text forward.

Moreover, reading Anzaldúa’s work as essays allows her writing to be read within the trajectory of essay writing over the last several centuries.⁶ Since her topic centers on identity – a central topic of many essays across time – the literary form of the essay provides the theoretical lens which allows readers to understand the narrating voice as connected to, yet distinct from, Anzaldúa the person. Thus, although essays in general often occupy the landscape of first-person narration and non-fictional content, the essay tradition also recognizes that a particular essay written at a particular moment may reflect some aspect of its author and her ideas while still remaining always contingent on that specific place and time. In other words, the essay allows for – and in some ways expects – that the essayist may later change her mind or change her writing (the expression of her current state of mind.) The essay as a critical lens for reading and understanding a piece of work thus complicates a one to one relationship between author and narrator despite the intimacy of the two roles. As I will demonstrate in my comparison of the two chapters below, such a distinction is important for engaging Anzaldúa’s work both generically and epistemologically. Since Anzaldúa defines her own work as autohistoria – “a term I use to describe the genre of writing

⁵ There is much overlap here with other essayists writing from the position of historical marginalization. See especially Jacqueline Royster’s work *Traces of a Stream* on African American writers working in the essay. Her first chapter and her reading of Alice Walker’s writing – made possible in part by the ways the “essay permits African American women to claim a personal speaking/thinking presence” – is particularly in dialogue with my understanding of the essay, its possibilities, and Anzaldúa’s use of the genre both intellectually and rhetorically (22).

⁶ See Tracy Cheavlier’s *Encyclopedia of the Essay* for one example of such a historical trajectory.

about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria – teoría is a personal essay that theorizes" – reading her work as essays acknowledges this productive overlap of genres and ways of knowing (now let us shift," 578).⁷

Although I want to argue for reading the selections below as essays, this does not mean that further attention should not also be paid to the way these essays interact in book format. For example, differences between consecutive chapters five and six of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* productively illustrate the range of strategies essays can employ, the multiple audiences they might seek to address, and the diverse ways identity can be explored and conveyed. In the next several pages, I analyze the hybrid work of these two chapters and narrate the opportunities that the teaching of hybrid essays has afforded my students.⁸ I argue that Anzaldúa's work makes use of hybridity in ways similar to Didion's text – juxtaposing multiple discourses, deploying multiple genres, and using innovative structuring techniques – however Anzaldúa offers an additional level of hybridity in terms of the many languages embedded within the text. Thus, Anzaldúa's work provides an extremely rich site for furthering students' attention to the range of discursive, rhetorical, and stylistic possibilities in their own writing. Following my discussion of the two chapters, I will therefore once again turn to the ways that students are called upon – through assignments – to respond to Anzaldúa's hybrid essays.

3.2.1 Writing Counters Traditions of Silence: Mestiza Identity in "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"

Anzaldúa's most frequently anthologized essay, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," exemplifies a hybrid essay in its use of multiple genres, rhetorics, discourses, and languages. Holding the text at arm's length,

⁷ From my point of view, Anzaldúa's work is theoretically rich despite the fact that, as Linda Martín Alcoff rightly claims in a recent issue of *PMLA*, her work and its "effect remains to be developed" (256). Alcoff notes particularly the ways that Postcolonial and Latina studies, in particular, have not significantly made use of her work. Alcoff does not note, in her survey of the disciplines that interact with Anzaldúa, the field of composition. My work in this chapter thus attempts to critically widen Anzaldúa's influence in terms of Composition, a similar motive as the cluster of articles in that January 2006 issue of *PMLA* which focus on the fields of Trans-American Literature, Feminism, and Queer Studies.

⁸ Anzaldúa uses the term hybrid in her assessment of her own work, referencing not only textual hybridity but conceptual hybridity. She writes: "I see a hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions" (66).

for instance, visually demonstrates the text's hybridity; readers quickly notice the text punctuated by space breaks, inserted and blocked portions of text, and multiple subheadings.

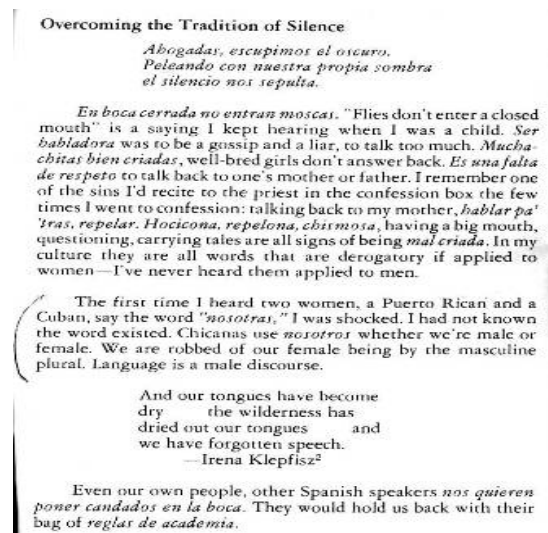


Figure 1: Anzaldúa's Visually Hybrid Text

As I hope is visible above, this readily apparent hybridity can assist students in engaging the composition of the text, an important strategy as they practice their ability to recognize the use of such diverse writing strategies and expand their own repertoire in new directions. As I will demonstrate in a reading of the first few pages of this essay, the textual features of "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" bubble to the surface, allowing students a concrete model for extending their own rhetorical, generic, and stylistic repertoires.

The essay begins with the metaphor of the narrator's visit to the dentist, establishing the chapter's central motif of "taming a wild tongue."⁹ For the dentist, the narrator's tongue is too unruly and disobedient. It keeps getting in the way and the dentist notes that "something must be done" about it (53). Reflecting on this experience, the narrator notes that for those who speak up against injustice, "Wild tongues can't be tamed. They can only be cut out" (54). This opening metaphor sets the stage for the

⁹ Throughout this article, I refer to the speaking persona or "I" within essays as a narrator in order to avoid the easy slippage – especially in creative non-fiction, memoir, or autohistoria writing – between author and the many narrators that author may deploy in writing, which, through their construction, do not map fully and easily onto the author. Anzaldúa, herself, describes this relationship in terms of the "outside author" who writes the text and the "narrative-voice author" in her interview with Andrea Lunsford, "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric."

analyses and arguments Anzaldúa constructs regarding the importance of language, linguistic identity, and cultural identity.

The beginning anecdote about the dentist is followed by a quote from artist Ray Gwyn Smith which, centered on the page, reads, “Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?” Beginning with a personal narrative and moving to an interrogative citation, Anzaldúa creates a hybrid structure which resonates with her exploration of linguistic identity. This fast-paced textual layering continues in the next three paragraphs. In the first paragraph following the quote, the narrator relates a childhood altercation with her Anglo teacher who admonished her for speaking Spanish at recess. In the second paragraph, the narrator quotes her mother’s desire for her children to speak English without an accent, a desire which coincided with the goals of the local schooling systems. Here, we are introduced to the mixing of English and Spanish text within the dialogue spoken by the narrator’s mother: the mother’s first sentence is in English, but is followed by two sentences which are completely in Spanish except for the last word “accent” which is in scare-quotes due to its English insertion within a Spanish sentence. Finally, in the third paragraph, Anzaldúa ends the chapter’s first short section declaratively with three sentences reading:

Attacks on one’s form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out. (54)

In addition to constructing a hybrid text that moves between different types of written expression, Anzaldúa’s piece adds a level of hybrid complexity by simultaneously moving between multiple languages in order to demonstrate – on the page – the importance and interaction of both languages.

It is important to notice, however, that whereas in the second paragraph the Spanish was contained within the mother’s dialogue – marking it as speech and as expression closely tied to identity and thus, in some ways, both expected and innocuous – in the above quotation the Spanish text is declaratively asserted by the narrator. It takes its place alongside the English text. This shift is important as it marks the shift from Spanish as tied to an individual’s way of speaking to a heightened reliance on

Spanish to communicate the argument of the piece. The use of Spanish not only assists the English text in making a point, but moves beyond what English is able to express to include other dimensions and meanings more ably present in Spanish. In the above quotation, for example, the Spanish text allows the narrator to shift the tone of the paragraph from a legal diction to a more personal tone, while at the same time more directly implicating those Anglos “with innocent faces” as those who attempt to censor language. This progression sets up the concluding sentence which circles back to the opening metaphor of the wild tongue, here asserting that only violence can “cure” such wildness.

This hybrid style – marked by changes in types of writing and argument, as well as changes in language usage – results in a text which weaves together multiple threads in order to approach a central idea. The structure of the first sub-headed section “Overcoming the Tradition of Silence” continues this hybrid, essayistic impetus in the third and fourth pages of the essay. This section consists of a range of writing I will explore briefly below: an introductory epigraph in Spanish, a longer paragraph, a shorter paragraph, a short poem written by Jewish writer Irena Klepfisz, and lastly, a very short paragraph of two sentences. Each of these sections of writing is held apart from the following section by a space break which marks each section as distinct from other sections. As rhetorical critics such as Julie Jung have argued, space breaks can be used purposefully to resist linear transitions, thus, making readers “listen” better.¹⁰

The beginning Spanish epigraph of “Overcoming the Tradition of Silence” sets the tone of the section by introducing the tropes of dark, light, and shadows and establishing a feeling of being buried by silence. The use of the three line epigraph entirely in Spanish establishes an alternative to English-only usage. In addition to specifically calling on women to enact a feminist confrontation to the tradition of

¹⁰ Jung, in her recent text *Revisionary Rhetoric, Feminist Pedagogy, and Multigenre Texts*, identifies the use of space breaks as a key feature of multigenre texts, arguing that “breaks – signified by white space on the printed page – ...separate one genre from the next...where the inclusion of diverse genres adds another layer of “vocality”” to the already multivocal text (33). Jung’s assertion that the use of space breaks demands that readers use an increased and different attention is helpful and is the case, I argue, with Anzaldúa’s multi-genre and hybridly linguistic text. However, I would also argue that holding the reader’s attention is not the only effect of such formal features as space breaks, as I show below in reading the space breaks as representative of the patriarchal silences the narrator seeks to overcome. Moreover, I would contend that the use of space breaks is not the only disruptive element of Anzaldúa’s texts and would point readers to the key examples of first, Anzaldúa’s mixing of multiple versions of Spanish and Spanish dialects alongside English and, second, her fierce, confrontational tone which can often be perceived as hostile by some readers.

patriarchal silence, it also enacts a possible way to counter the “tradition” of silence through alternative and confrontational language usage. Moreover, the three-line epigraph accelerates the amount of Spanish the reader encounters. The long paragraph that follows the epigraph heightens this movement since its first sentence is also written in Spanish; however, the trend of this paragraph is to introduce cultural sayings and phrases which are then translated or contextualized by the English text within the paragraph. Here, the English text serves the purposes and meanings of the Spanish text: the two languages are integrated within sentences, the narrator moving back and forth between the two as she establishes the litany of phrases used to denigrate women and their speech.

The following short paragraph – the third piece of text among the five which constitute the section – elaborates the patriarchal nature of discourse through the narrator’s recollection of the first time she heard the feminine plural of “we” – *nosotras*. Anzaldúa writes:

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word “*nosotras*,” I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we’re male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse. (54)

This paragraph concretizes the idea that women can be culturally degraded and minimized through language. Thus, the cultural experience of women is given specific weight by the narrator’s remembrance of being struck by the use of *nosotras*. By turning to a personal example, the essay unites personal evidence with a more academic, claim-based argument: “We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse” (54).

Emphasizing this thought – but in a different register – the essay jumps from this argument-driven rhetoric to the realm of the poetic. Juxtaposing this more argumentative discourse is the following poem, by Jewish writer Irena Klepfisz:

And our tongues have become
dry the wilderness has
dried out our tongues and

we have forgotten speech.

Formally, the shift to poetic language and form extends the narrator's ability to move between shifting discourses and types of writing. The use of white space within the poem accents the themes of language aridity and visually invokes the forgetting of languages. This use of white space thus also provides a formal bridge to Anzaldúa's use of the space break. In this section as a whole, silence is invoked on the page through space break – patches of speech and ideas are simultaneously held apart for contemplation even as they are joined under the section title "Overcoming the Tradition of Silence." In this way, each part of the section seems a step in breaking that tradition, overcoming silence via its individual speech act. Yet things are not quite so simple, as the narrator points out in the two sentence concluding paragraph of the section: "Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *regles de academia*" (54). Even as the narrator seeks to build an illustrative and suggestive argument suggesting how silence might be overcome, the text seems discontent with resolving too easily or sacrificing the complex dynamics surrounding language use to simplistic, or overly hopeful, lines of thought.

As I hope I've shown in the analysis of this section, hybridity exists not only as the central content of the piece – the inquiry and difficulty being explored – but it appropriately becomes the concomitant form of the writing as well. In order to discuss hybridity, it seems (at least for Anzaldúa) that it is necessary to view and write the world through hybridity. Students are quick to notice this connection; it makes sense, they argue, that the *way* the essay works helps to express *what* it argues. Since the construction of the essay makes visible the diverse expressions of the narrator's linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identities, students can readily pinpoint the various positions the narrator occupies. By enumerating the range of positions Anzaldúa's narrator occupies, students can both attend to the ways she narrates and represents these positions through language and begin to think about their own multiple subject positions and facets of identity.

These are crucial conceptual moves, particularly for young students who may not have considered "identity" to be other than singular, stable, and unifying. As the narrator of Anzaldúa's piece suggests,

solutions, peoples, and interpretations are multiple; no easy alliances can be found even in such a population as “our own people” or “Spanish speakers.” Forced to negotiate informative and argumentative sections, personal reflection and narration, students must negotiate the narrator’s place(s) within these cultural fissures and borders. As we’ve seen in this excerpt, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” works largely to enlighten the reader through an assemblage of written expression. Even as the text ultimately relies upon argumentative, declarative, and expository rhetoric to make its points, Anzaldúa demonstrates that the “fragmented pieces” of identity and subject position can begin “to fall together” into persuasive argument via a hybrid textual form which makes room for multiple ways of knowing and expressing the self. Excited by the possibility of figuring themselves and their identity positions in multiple ways, students can begin to imagine the range of positions they, too, occupy and the discourses that signify those positions.

3.2.2 Complicating Argumentative Discourse: The Writer as Knower in “*Tlilli, Tlapalli* / The Path of the Red and Black Ink”

In Chapter Six, however, Anzaldúa complicates the ways of understanding identity she has already established. If in Chapter Five a sense of mestiza-hybridity serves as the primary identity, in Chapter Six this sense narrows to a specific aspect of the narrator’s identity – that of a writer, and a writer influenced significantly by her Indian heritage and its culture. If Chapter Five primarily occupied a historical, cultural, and argumentative space – a space rhetorically familiar to students even though the structure of the essay might be different – Chapter Six filters these perspectives through deeply personal, narrative, and reflexive writing. The diverse formal structure mimics the chapter’s move toward a more personal and specific exploration of identity through its increased use of non-English writing, often present in longer pieces of text (the longest is a three-paragraph, half-page block of Spanish.) Here, the use of more Spanish builds on both the trust the narrator has established with the reader in the prior chapters and the strategies that reader has developed for engaging both Spanish and English written text, including

dialects.¹¹ As Chapter Six spirals in to examine the more particular individual identity of the narrator, increased reliance on Spanish within the text enacts the writer's communication and way of being a writer in the world. It is my contention that reading "*Tilli, Tlapalli* / The Path of the Red and Black Ink" in conversation with "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" further widens the range of writing strategies students can make use of in their own essay writing.

Part of the useful work of Chapter Six is to provide a range of metaphors and descriptions for understanding what it means to write and what it means to be a writer. These descriptions range across a spectrum of positions for the writer, beginning with situating the writer as a worker, a crafter of language: "Picking out images from my soul's eye, fishing for the right words to recreate the images. Words are blades of grass pushing past the obstacles, sprouting on the page..." (71). The verbs used here highlight the range of writing activities, from the more purposeful "picking out," to the tentative "fishing," to the spontaneous "sprouting." Anzaldúa seems to embrace the multiplicity of writing and its processes, writing:

Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer – a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen." (72)

Anzaldúa characterizes writing as both waiting and crafting in order to multiply the ways that we think about writing. Indeed, her passage works to define one perception of writing followed immediately by "its opposite." Often writing involves struggle – defined or sensed – "coming up against all sorts of walls." She writes: "That's what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be" (73). Students readily identify with this range of descriptions of writing and often voice their own felt sense that writing is, indeed, a struggle.

¹¹ Such "trust" is established with the reader both on the level of the chapter-essay as a distinct piece of writing (Spanish increases and builds later in the essay) and on the level of the book as a whole (Spanish and deeply personal reflection increases later in the book). This observation dovetails with my figuring of the chapters as essays in their own right and as a series of essay which are productively read in the order of the collection.

Anzaldúa's description assists students in thinking about writing as not only a means of communicating, but a way of oscillating between ways of understanding, making meaning, and interpreting. This process of struggle and of making meaning oscillates between the muddy terrain of "worse and better," writer and text.

Chapter Six thus provides a context for discussing these relationships in dialogue with students' experiences of writing. One correlation Anzaldúa's narrator particularly explores is that between feeling and knowing, between the conscious and the unconscious – relationships clearly expressed in the juxtaposition of Chapters Five and Six. Although Chapter Five emphasizes language's ability to negotiate these relationships, in Chapter Six Anzaldúa points to the image as a key intermediary: "An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious" (69). The latter sentence seems to express the ability of the image to tap into and capture something about an idea or emotion which may not be as readily expressed in words. In positing the image as another knowledge possibility, Anzaldúa widens the essay's purview beyond the argumentative discourse of Chapter Five and extends it to other ways of knowing. As Andrea Lunsford notes in her summary of Anzaldúa's career and interview with the writer entitled "Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric," Anzaldúa demonstrates an "insistence that visual images and words belong together in all kinds of ways as well as a rich mix of languages...and registers" (45). (I will take up this issue of the image more directly in Chapters Four and Five of the dissertation.)

These images and words can then be woven together in hybrid and essayistic fashion. Anzaldúa writes: "This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance" (66). She continues to discuss the process of composing such an essay by asserting:

If I can get the bone structure right, then putting flesh on it proceeds without too many hitches. The problem is that the bones often do not exist prior to the flesh, but are shaped after a vague and broad shadow of its form is discerned or uncovered during beginning,

middle and final stages of writing...The whole thing has had a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will...Though it is a flawed thing – a clumsy, complex, groping, blind thing – for me it is alive, infused with spirit. I talk to it; it talks to me. (67)

The sense of negotiation in writing acts as the primary metaphor for this description, yet it is worth noticing how little control the narrator feels she has over the piece.¹² The piece is unwieldy since the form – the bones – cannot exist prior to, or as distinct from, the “flesh.” Instead the writing process itself – the stages she refers to – allow the essay to emerge from a “vague and broad shadow” to something more distinct and meaningful. This movement between the bones and the flesh – between, less gracefully, form and content – simulates the movement between a writer creating a dialogue with the world around her. As Anzaldúa concludes, when writing, “I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world’s soul, I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world” (70).

Several implications emerge from engaging Anzaldúa’s work in the composition classroom and working with these two chapters particularly. First, although it is important to notice the similarities in hybrid structure between these two essays, it is also crucial to notice how the regularly anthologized “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” differs substantially from the less popular chapter which follows it. The “argument” of Chapter Six, for example, is much more tentative and exploratory as it seeks to articulate what it means to be a writer, what it means to tell stories. The groping nature of Chapter Six is apparent from the chapter’s inception where the cultural legend of an appearing and disappearing phantom dog is introduced. This transitory and speculative approach continues in the stylistic repetition of the phrase “It must have been then”: “It must have been then that I decided to put stories on paper. It must have been then that working with images and writing became connected to night” (65). This repetition uses initial

¹² In other places, Anzaldúa complicates the direction of this interaction, suggesting that she can control what is inside of her by beginning with “words, images, and body sensations and animat[ing] them to impress them on my consciousness, thereby making changes in my belief system and reprogramming my consciousness” (70). At other times, she summons stories and emotions, asking to channel and convey them.

recollections as a heuristic to try to figure out when the narrator learned to both write stories and to associate stories with the night. Yet although repetition often serves to ground an assertion more forcefully, the repetition of the speculative “must have been” (as compared to the simpler and more direct “was”) serves instead to highlight the tentative nature of this conclusion. Compared to Chapter Five – a chapter erected to explore hybrid linguistic and ethnic identity and to argue for the legitimization of such identity – Chapter Six continues the exploration begun in the first section throughout the essay, using the motif of groping as a central epistemology of the piece. Teaching these two chapter-essays in conversation makes visible the diverse ways that writing can assist a writer in both coming to know and in representing those knowledges.

Second, in addition to balancing more argument-driven chapters with alternate structures and styles of argumentation, Anzaldúa’s work provides fertile ground for class discussions concerning what writing and writers can do. In my classroom, for example, we use Anzaldúa as a way to expand our sense of what writing can do. Over the course of our interactions with Anzaldúa, students can pinpoint how Anzaldúa uses writing *both* to figure out a problem *and* to express her relationship to that problem, providing possible answers and arguments within a rich context. When discussing her writing, students often describe Anzaldúa as a writer who knows what she wants to say and constructs her text to most effectively express her ideas; yet students also point to and seem to appreciate the way that Anzaldúa acknowledges the difficulty of the writing process and the struggle to create meaning in written language. As a class, we put such acknowledgements to use as we attempt to write for diverse purposes and audiences while also using writing as a way to discover, inquire, and inhabit an intellectual arena.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Anzaldúa provides a complex, yet remarkably accessible, text through which students can consider their own identities and their own writing as more fluid and constructed and less instrumental and static. As critic Diane Fowlkes notes in her article “Moving from Feminist Identity Politics to Coalition Politics Through a Feminist Materialist Standpoint of Intersubjectivity in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*,” Anzaldúa polemically poses “challenges to dominant models of knowledge formation,” especially those which

privilege “singular subjectivity” and rely on “Cartesian and positivist scientific models” in order to present “alternative ways of characterizing and knowing reality” (111). As I have suggested above and as I have explored in more depth elsewhere, if Chapter Five works to articulate “a form of subjectivity...[that is] flexible, [and] complexly defined” as Fowlkes suggests, it is Chapter Six, and its juxtaposition to Chapter Five, that most fully presents alternatives to singular ways of knowing and representing reality (108).¹³ Within the space of each of these essays, hybridity exists thematically (mestiza identity), conceptually (knowing and representing identity), and structurally/formally (the text’s hybrid representation of these issues.)¹⁴

Through such hybrid exploration, Anzaldúa participates in a long tradition of essay-writing technique, yet her use of multiple narratives, types of writing that exceed what we imagine to be the traditional voice of an essay narrator (such as lists, poems, colloquialisms, etc.), and most particularly the form her essay takes push the boundaries of what may be normally recognized as an essay. Fowlkes names this style of writing “complex identity narration...involving an interlacing of autobiographical narrative with historical, political, philosophical, cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and psychological analyses and syntheses” (108-9). Although many of these discourses have been deployed by essayists since Montaigne, Anzaldúa’s particular assemblage of different types of language and discourse in her hybrid essays makes visible the range of possible essay-writing. Moreover, Anzaldúa figures this hybrid writing as a knowledge possibility grounded in theorizing the personal and deploying it not as singular reality, but instead as a framing and narrating tool – strategies that can be particularly important for first-year writing students to learn. The movement of these essays between the personal and the cultural, uniting the self and the world in critically inflected and powerful ways, provides an important model for students

¹³ I have explored each of these chapters and their implications for feminist epistemologies further elsewhere. See “Writing the Self: Gloria Anzaldúa, Textual Form, and Feminist Epistemology” in *Michigan Feminist Studies*, Issue 20.

¹⁴ For a useful critique of the ways in which the concept of mestiza identity has been transplanted and transported beyond its meaningful and situated cultural context, see Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano’s article “Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*: Cultural Studies, “Difference,” and the Non-Unitary Subject.” My emphasis on the discursive and epistemological hybridity in this chapter (and in my work with students) seeks to avoid such an easy appropriation of such a term. For more on the uses of the term mestiza within classrooms, see also Simona Hill’s “Teaching la Conciencia de la Mestiza in the Midst of White Privilege.”

exploring the range of writing strategies for knowing and expressing ideas in writing. To what extent, however, do the many textbooks which excerpt Anzaldúa's writing take up the work I've described and valued in the analysis above?

3.2.3 Putting Anzaldúa to Work: Prompts for Writing

Anzaldúa's work is anthologized in several regularly used and quite popular composition textbooks including, among others, Samuel Cohen's *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology* (both editions), Bizzell and Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition* (2001), Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Ways of Reading* (5th, 6th, and 7th eds.), and more recently, *Remix: Reading and Composing Culture* (Latterell, 2006). Although the inclusion of her text – most often the chapter “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” – in anthologies does not ensure that teachers assign this particular excerpt, the wide number of texts that include and/or refer to her work, often across several editions, suggests the productivity and popularity of Anzaldúa's hybrid writing.

Although several contemporary textbooks include “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” or other excerpts from Anzaldúa, the ways students are asked to read and write in response to the text differs substantially. Reading questions most often focus heavily on what Anzaldúa “means” by certain phrases or concepts: linguistic terrorism, wild tongues, *mestiza*, etc. Few questions ask students to attend to or account for the style of the text, its structure, or its effects. In a similarly limited manner, writing questions tend to ask students to engage only one aspect of Anzaldúa's essay. Catherine Latterell's recent *Re-Mix: Reading + Composing Culture*, for example, provides the following writing prompt:

Anzaldúa writes that she speaks a number of different versions of Spanish that she learned from different people, in different situations. Do you speak different versions of your native language? If so, how did you learn these versions? Does the language or dialect you use depend on the situation and the people you're talking to? To investigate the ways we communicate in different environments, write a critical analysis of your

linguistic experience. Identify at least one setting – at home, with your family, at work, or out with friends, for example – in which you use a different or “nonstandard” way of speaking. (59)

The next part of this prompt asks students to describe their “main communication goals,” the way the language varies from more standard versions, the context that demands such usage, and the connections of such language to identity, community, and culture in their analysis.

Although students are asked to pay some attention to the connections between language and culture in this prompt, such an assignment is nonetheless simplistic and instrumental. Instead of needing to puzzle through Anzaldúa’s diverse and complex uses of language and discourse, this assignment merely asks students to pick up the idea of language use depending “on the situation and the people you’re talking to” (isn’t this always the case?) and to readily apply this concept to their own experience. It’s not hard to imagine the equally simplistic essays students might rightfully generate to a writing prompt that asks them to think about a “nonstandard way of speaking” that they might use at work or with their friends. By offering such an assignment not only does *Re-Mix* not invite students to think – and write – like Anzaldúa does, but it points students toward a surface-level engagement with her text and seems to anticipate (and encourage) straightforward and equally uni-dimensional writing from students.

The instrumental tenor of the assignment I’ve quoted above is further cemented by the way Anzaldúa’s essay is excerpted and presented in *Re-Mix*. It is crucial to note that Latterell’s excerpt of “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” ends prematurely, leaving off the final five pages of the essay. In this way, *Re-Mix* actually re-writes the essay. The excerpt in this textbook ends with Anzaldúa listing the many voices that make up her identity and her reclamation of those voices. By ending with Anzaldúa’s assertion that she “will overcome the tradition of silence” (followed by the short poem stressing the need to speak in code), *Re-Mix* presents a familiar message with which many students might more comfortably relate. By eliding the rest of the essay, including the more challenging and confrontational ending of the

original essay, Latterell not only significantly alters the meaning and purposes of “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” but does her students a disservice in the process.¹⁵

In contrast to such an assignment, some textbooks have found ways to acknowledge the complexity of Anzaldúa’s essay as well as the intricacies of the essay’s hybrid form. Two of the four questions from the *Ways of Reading* series prompt students to write in ways that might be thought of as hybrid. One question asks students, for example, to follow Anzaldúa’s example and “write an argument of your own, one that requires you to use a variety of voices, in which you carefully present the various voices that you feel are a part of you or a part of the argument” (88). This question asks students to weave together multiple voices – and most likely multiple discourses – in order to construct a composed argument.

A more directly hybrid assignment is the first question for writing in *Ways of Reading*. After summarizing Anzaldúa’s description of her own hybrid text, the assignment asks students to construct a similarly hybrid text. The assignment is worth quoting at length:

As an experiment whose goal is the development of an alternate (in Anzaldúa’s terms, a mixed or *mestiza*) understanding, write an autobiographical text whose shape and motives could be described in her terms: a mosaic, woven, with numerous overlays; a montage, a beaded work, a crazy dance, drawing on the various ways of thinking, speaking, understanding that might be said to be part of your own mixed cultural position, your own mixed sensibility.

To prepare for this essay, think about the different positions you could be said to occupy, the different voices that are part of your background or present, the competing ways of thinking that make up your points of view. Imagine that your goal is to present your world and your experience to those who are not necessarily prepared to be sympathetic or to understand. And, following Anzaldúa, you should work to construct a

¹⁵ This shortening of the essay occurs in other readers as well and sometimes combines with other significant editing practices. For example, the 3rd edition of *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers* also edits the essay in this way; however, in this textbook all words, phrases, or sentences in Spanish are translated by the editors at the foot of the page. Such translation might make the essay more approachable and/or easier to understand, yet it is my contention that such editing also erases the intentional difficulty of the text. Moreover, such a presentation undermines and essentially evacuates questions the textbook asks of students such as “Would the essay have a different impact if it were written all in English?” (583).

mixed text, not a single unified one. This will be hard, since you will be writing what might be called a “forbidden” text, one you have not been prepared to write. (87)

There are several elements of this assignment that I find more valuable than the first example I cited. First, Bartholomae and Petrosky do justice to the complexity of both Anzaldúa’s form and content by relying heavily on her descriptions of her text and in using the first writing prompt to invite students to explore writing in a way that they may not have been “prepared to write.” Second, although this assignment also asks students to connect themselves and their experiences to Anzaldúa’s experience, they are prompted to consider not only their “nonstandard” use of language (as Latterell prompts) but to also consider their different subject positions and the “competing ways of thinking” that help construct their use of discourse. Finally, this assignment recognizes the fraught relationship Anzaldúa’s text enacts with her (many) audiences and asks students to occupy a similarly difficult position with their readers. In short, the *Ways of Reading* assignment asks students to be more fully in dialogue with both what Anzaldúa says and how she goes about saying it. The assignment expects more of students and in so doing takes both Anzaldúa and student-writers more seriously.

Assignments such as those found in *Ways of Reading* (and assignments developed by individual instructors that value similar complexities) provide ways for students to enter the intellectual arena that the essay constructs. Anzaldúa illustrates the powerful work that can be achieved by making discourses, genres, and even beliefs jostle each other within the same textual space, fighting it out, as it were, in unexpected and often resistant ways. Learning to instigate this “back-talking” of one discourse to another – and learning to use personal experience reflexively to assist in this dialogue – are key strategies for first-year students learning to negotiate the sea of discourse that surrounds them. As we, their teachers, read their texts, it is up to us to listen for these voices, these discourses, these genres fighting it out on the page and to make these hybridizations part of our ongoing conversation with students about their writing.

The final section of this chapter charts such an ongoing conversation by tracing the concrete ways students participated in such an intellectual arena through reading and writing hybrid essays. By examining a series of assignments and student essays, I hope to suggest what might be particularly useful

about essayism in intellectual communities such as universities, as well as the ways that hybrid essays can play a fruitful role in the first-year composition classroom more specifically. In providing my own account of asking students to write hybrid essays I reflect on the necessary changes I needed to make to my pedagogy in light of their responses. And I offer suggestions for pedagogies that diversify the ways we teach our students and ask them to think and write, thus widening the intellectual arena we, as teachers, help to build.

3.3 HYBRIDIZING STUDENT ESSAYS: ASSIGNMENTS, STUDENT WRITING, AND FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION

A preliminary step in making sense is learning to look, listen, and look again, to think well, and to speak as though knowledge is now and has always been in the making.
- Jacqueline Royster, *Traces of a Stream*

This final section of the chapter focuses primarily on assignments and student writing; however, since I firmly believe that writing and reading are interconnected activities I will transition from my readings of Didion and Anzaldúa by describing briefly the ways that reading plays an integral role in classes like the one I describe below. As I argued in Chapter One, reading practices which focus on difficulty as an interpretative opening help to address the complexities of relationship between the writer and her multiple audiences. In concrete terms, asking students to read not only in terms of content – what Anzaldúa is saying and why a particular phrase or image might offend or trouble particular readers – but to also read in terms of style, genre, and form provides one way for asks students to supplement emotional reactions with rhetorical awareness.¹⁶ Such a reading practice unites a range of responses that theorists such as

¹⁶ This is particularly the case when discussing the conclusion to “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” the same conclusion that many anthologies that excerpt Anzaldúa’s work choose to excise. Although this conclusion is difficult – students often read this part of the text in particular as violent and accusatory – it provides rich

Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar, in her article “Radical Rhetoric: Anger, Activism, and Change,” contend are central to understanding Anzaldúa’s work since they open up “spaces where reader and writer, oppressed and oppressor, acknowledge their complicity in perpetuating the status quo...by actively engaging (some might say accusing) her readers, Anzaldúa compels them to struggle with racism on emotional and intellectual levels” (231, 230).

Moreover, asking students to ascertain why Anzaldúa conveys and constructs her essays as she does – why she deploys a range of rhetorics and discourses to create different effects for different audiences, for example – or asking them to try to determine how Didion has, in fact, suggested what “it means,” points them back to texts as capable readers engaged in the meaning making process alongside these authors. Such investigations necessitate, in part, teaching students how to become better readers, more careful listeners, more generous interlocutors than they already might be. It asks them to slow down, noticing how things are put together and why and to what effect, a much more intimate exercise than looking for something like the main idea – a technique in which most students are confident and skilled. In short, asking these types of questions redirects students to how a particular text achieves its work; it asks students to continually open up difficulties and complicate readings instead of moving in the opposite, reductive, direction.

Conversations about our readings of texts that privilege this type of “how” question asks students to focus intimately at the sentence level and the relationships between sentences. More broadly, it asks them to focus on the relationship between style, structure, and meaning. This is an exciting relationship for many students, as they realize that the form of Anzaldúa’s writing, or any composed text for that matter, is not just happenstance but makes sense in terms of what the piece is saying. In the case of Anzaldúa, the structural form and the movement between texts is part and parcel of the thematic concerns

opportunities for discussing Anzaldúa’s relationship to her many audiences and the purposeful exclusion, at certain moments, of some of those audiences. Although a major source of discussion in my teaching of Anzaldúa, the focus of this chapter requires only a gesture to the reading pedagogies grounded in difficulty that I referenced in Chapter One. Andrea Lunsford, in her interview with Anzaldúa, raises some of these questions regarding student resistance. For especially insightful discussions of student resistance/interaction in reading Anzaldúa’s work see the essays by Beth Barilla, Simona J. Hill, and Amanda Espinosa-Aguilar in Keating’s collection *Entre Mundos / Among Worlds*.

of the piece – they cannot be separated out from one another, but instead intensify and support one another. Asking students to notice such relationships – how they are established and reinforced in the prose of a piece – allows students to establish not only the critical close-reading practices valued in liberal arts programs and English departments especially, but also prepares them to pay this kind of close attention to their own writing choices and the relationships they establish between form and content in their pieces.

With these reading practices in mind, I'd like to turn now to a series of assignments designed to engage students in writing in dialogue with hybrid essays. The specific assignments I will detail below encourage students to explore essayistic forms to see how such forms might assist in writing about identity – an issue around which many first-year writing classes are organized. Jung suggests that asking students to write in multi-genre forms can make visible the ways that shifts between genres can “suggest a desire to voice a subject position that exceeds the boundaries of genre, discipline, and institution” (59). Anzaldúa's perception of herself as embodying mestiza hybridity and existence between and among – sometimes outside – ways of thinking and being in the world also translates to her theories about writing texts and writing selves:

Tu autohistoria is not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds.
Forced to rework your story, you invent new notions of yourself and reality –
increasingly multidimensional versions where body, mind, and spirit interpenetrate in
more complex ways (now let us shift, 578)

These assignments ask students to approach their words and their ideas as “drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds” through the acts of composing, reflecting, and revising.

I present these particular assignments as also worthy of commentary due to my own shifting position. The first two assignments I present were part of the Staff Sequence I taught in conjunction with mentoring new Teaching Assistants at the University of Pittsburgh.¹⁷ Teaching this assignment after

¹⁷ This staff sequence was conceptualized and written by Jennifer Lee at the University of Pittsburgh; she has given permission for me to cite her work here.

many years of individually designing my own courses produced several intersecting demands to which I needed to attend: working with an assignment which was not my own but which I nonetheless believed in and was committed to, finding ways to fill in the day-to-day work to make both the overall assignment and the overall course trajectory successful (a similar position as the beginning teachers I mentored), and thinking about how best to support my mentees – how I could, if asked, articulate my pedagogical choices and discuss with them their own day-to-day lesson plans, objectives, and pedagogies. Below I narrate a series of assignments, the writing that a particular student produced in response to these assignments, and the pedagogical strategies I developed in response to writing such as hers. My goal in this narration is not only to demonstrate the thoughtful work students constructed in response to Didion’s hybrid essay (in their writing and in our workshops) and the ways that writing hybrid essays was generative for a typical student, but also to illustrate one reflexive and recursive trajectory that positioned students’ essays as an ongoing and continuous conversation within a larger intellectual arena.

In this first-year writing course, our class text was *The Best Essays of the Century* edited by Robert Atwan and Joyce Carol Oates. Early in the semester students had already composed some shorter assignments and a long essay after reading James Baldwin “Notes of a Native Son.” Students had also been briefly introduced to Joan Didion as an essayist through an allusion to her essay “Notes from a Native Daughter” which extended Baldwin’s project in relation to Didion’s own upbringing in California. In this second long essay assignment, students were asked to write an essay of their own entitled “Notes of a Native Son/Daughter.” Here are a few sentences from that prompt:

While your subject may be quite different from either James Baldwin’s or Joan Didion’s, your goal will be to work autobiographically, to tell a story or series of related stories that allow you to both *explore* and *say something* about the way you have been shaped by the time and place in which you live.

In short, this second assignment asked students to continue thinking about many of the issues Baldwin had raised in his essay – the connection between individuals, families, and the larger culture, as well as the tensions that mark contemporary American life, including racial tensions – but to explore such issues

with more attention to their personal relationship to and stake in these realities. Since many students had written their first essays from quite similar points of view (emphasizing, most notably, the somewhat irreconcilable “bitterness” they attributed to Baldwin and his ability to overcome prejudice) this second essay offered the opportunity to ground the ideas prompted by Baldwin within their own experiences.

Despite this shift in direction, this assignment also proved challenging for many students who, although willing to be introspective (as Baldwin was) and to tell as a story that was important to them (as Didion did), seemed unable to find ways to link their personal experiences to the “time and place” in which they found themselves. As is the case with the paper I will discuss momentarily, many students (who were no doubt struggling to write about something as powerful as Baldwin’s experience) turned to the events of 9/11 and thus not surprisingly also wrote very similar second essays that drew on familiar public discourses concerning terrorism, patriotism, and racism.

In light of these essays and with the third essay assignment in mind, I intervened in the semester’s trajectory with several strategies to both address these two long essays and to prepare for the third assignment. The strategies I describe below were aimed at helping students push their ideas in the first two papers to the next, more critical, level and to thus take advantage of the choice that the third assignment presented them. When they arrived at the third assignment, students would be asked to read Didion’s “The White Album” and to use it as a way to revise either of their earlier essays. I knew that students would be asked to either revise their essay on Baldwin:

How does Didion’s essay – its subject matter and style – cause you to *re-see* or *re-think* James Baldwin’s project? ...How might “The White Album” be said to open up the question of what an essay can, or should do?

Or, revise their second essay on their time and place:

Revise Essay #2 by employing Didion’s formal strategies. For instance, you might incorporate excerpts from other texts – documents from your own life or from news reports. You might take on the role of the skeptic, asking questions and challenging your own conclusions.

Both of the choices for the third essay asked students to make use of the essay genre and to attend to the essay's proclivity for incorporating multiple stories and multiple texts with an eye toward critical skepticism. Although we had been working in class and particularly in workshop to practice constructing concrete, evocative details that were substantial enough to support such a connection between an individual and her wider socio-cultural environment, I felt students might benefit from a few transitional assignments before attempting this third essay.

To this end, a first strategy I developed consisted of a "class comment" which I directed to the class as a whole. I hoped that this comment might help students think toward revision and how they might engage the complexities of the assignment. There were three main issues I asked students to think about: establishing a broader context, establishing the narrator as a "native" son or daughter, and showing the reader the experiences through use of scene. Each of these were elements the class had discussed in relationship to Baldwin's essay but which many students had only begun to apply to their own essays. In the class comment I thus suggested both a strategy for constructing these effective writing techniques and proposed a way for students to do some of this work before writing their revision. I offer excerpts from each section of the class comment to illustrate:

- **Establish a broader cultural context.** Although most of you used a personal experience as the center of your essay and some of you mentioned broader contexts of society or culture, few of you took the opportunity to use your experience as the lens through which you made some distinct observations about the time and place in which you live....*Return to Baldwin and find a few moments where he moves between a particular narrative moment out to a broader cultural moment – we see this linking set up for us even from the beginning, where he describes his father's death and the riots in Harlem in nearly the same breath.*
- **Establish yourself as a "native" son or daughter.** Both Baldwin and Didion position themselves as descendants of particular histories that have and continue to shape them and their social landscapes...Both, however, position themselves as cultural critics – people who are able to speak for the place and time and people who are willing to implicate themselves and their own actions in the problems they identify. *Think about*

- **Show, don't tell, your reader your experiences.** As we discussed, some of Baldwin's strongest and most compelling narrative moments (which are later subjected to his own and our intense scrutiny and introspection) result from allowing the unfolding of the event through a scene...For example, in the restaurant encounter with the waitress: imagine how this scene would have lost a significant amount of its power if we had not seen the events unfold before us (we're being shown them as they happen instead of having them summarized for us)...*practice constructing at least one key narrative moment in your essay as an actual real-time narrative that your reader can experience...If you already have such a scene, consider whether this is the best moment to show your readers in terms of what your essay seeks to accomplish.*

In addition to asking students to focus on how they saw themselves as connected to broader societal and cultural contexts with my use of the above comment, I also tried a second strategy of using some of our workshops to draw on elements of creative writing pedagogy. Since Didion's work can be productively understood as creative non-fiction, we worked on developing moments or scenes where the resonances of both the personal and the cultural intersected (trying to touch on all three comments cited above.) Since I anticipated the third assignment which would directly ask students to consider how the world around them helps to construct the ways they see and position themselves, our workshops asked them to imagine constructing moments in their writing that offered a way for readers to forge this same link. Stressing that students could fill in the details of a scene – even if they did not fully remember them – helped students think more substantially about the composed construction of their text and the “stories” and interpretations they were hoping to share.

I focus below on two essays by one student who attempted to revise her second essay, “Notes of a Native Daughter essay,” in light of Didion's “The White Album.”¹⁸ Beth Kramer's first essay on Baldwin fit many of the patterns I described above. Although she had a good eye for important sections of Baldwin's text to discuss, she did not yet follow through on her interpretations and ideas and thus often

¹⁸ All students work is cited with express permission to do so. In cases where students have expressed the preference of not being cited by name, I have either referred to the student generally or used a pseudonym.

concluded a particular analysis with a more ready commonplace, for example: “We must accept not only the African Americans, but all races of people, as well as all religions and all differences in mankind” or “He endures this struggle with racism, and his father, and now realizes his new strength” (4, 5). Similar patterns continued in her second essay, where Kramer considered her high school career and her transition to college through the lens of the valedictory at her graduation ceremony. It was my hope that the combination of the feedback I had given her on these essays and the work we had done with the class comment and our workshops would enable her to tackle a subject of some depth and to take advantage of the essay’s power of critical scrutiny in her third essay using “The White Album.”

Like many students, Beth Kramer chose to write about her experience of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. For Kramer, this third essay was an improvement. I admired the way she oscillated between the moment of the airplane crashes (mediated by the television and her classmates’ reactions) and actual coverage of the crashes on CNN; likewise, I appreciated the way she tried to focus her essay beyond these events (and herself) to the experiences of her Muslim friend, Zein. In class, we workshoped her paper, paying particular attention to how the more hybrid structure of her essay was working.

Kramer’s paper began with a quote from the news-source CNN which set the scene of the bombing of the World Trade Centers. Students in workshop agreed that this quote effectively catapulted the reader into the scene, setting the time and place of the incident before spiraling in to local effects and, finally, to Kramer’s own location within her school:

At 8:45 a.m., the first of two airliners crashed into the World Trade Center, opening a horrifying and apparently coordinated terrorist attack on the United States, which saw the collapse of the two 110-story towers into surrounding Manhattan streets and a later attack on the Pentagon (cnn.com).

No one could reach home. All long distance circuits were busy, and all cell phones were dead. Among other things, the air attack had taken out the antennae used by area broadcasters. The local TV news was only available on cable. Battery Park had been evacuated. The entire downtown area was being blockaded.

While New York City struggled, I was in World Cultures with twenty-two other students diligently working on our Greek project. (1)

Here Kramer uses the excerpt to set the scene then proceeds in her next paragraph to use stylistically short, direct sentences to relay the disparate facts of the matter. The scene zooms in further to the students who received the news while in World Cultures class, and continues by gauging the classmates' initial reactions. At the end of this paragraph, Kramer inserts a second excerpt from CNN:

September 11th is deemed the second Pearl Harbor. The sequel erupted on September 11, 2001 when hijacked planes destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and parts of the west wing of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Borders into the United States were closed and the FAA shut down all airports across the nation (cnn.com)

By the reading of the class, this excerpt was less effective than the first. The class noted that the second excerpt from CNN felt decontextualized, due in part to its confusing sense of time in the first two sentences. Whereas students liked the first excerpt as a powerful beginning to the essay and as a textual effect which seemed to match the actual event in its unpredictability, they questioned the use of this second quotation. Kramer follows the quotation with the sentence, "On the news, it seemed as though I was watching a movie." Again, students liked this idea (many of them had felt similarly) but they wanted to be shown this experience more clearly in the text.

Kramer's next paragraph goes on to describe her classmates' fears about their relatives in New York, her own concern for her aunt and uncle who lived nearby, and a racist comment made to a Muslim classmate by another student. In response to the racist comment, Kramer's narrator shifts to a reflective and questioning tone to end the paragraph: "She [the Muslim student] ignored him but tears began to form in her eyes. Why would he say something like that? Are we still discriminating against other races?" In workshop, the class noted that the undercurrent of racism the narrator notes – and her reaction to it – seems to be at the heart of much of the paper. Yet some students questioned Kramer's perhaps too naïve interrogative – "Are we still discriminating against other races?" – and pressed for a deeper and more critical engagement with this issue.

In the middle section of the essay Kramer makes the following moves:

- The essay pauses momentarily to update us on the status of her aunt and uncle,

- The next two paragraphs shift to describe another attack, this time on the narrator's Muslim friend, Zein, and his family,
- The essay jumps to a new paragraph returning to the link between September 11th's attacks and the bombing of Pearl Harbor as a way to contextualize the abuse of citizens,
- And, the essay provides a last "flashcut" to CNN with a short quotation describing attacks made on a Sikh gas station owner and a Sikh preacher who were targeted because of their dress.

Conversation in workshop centered on this last excerpt concerning attacks on Sikhs and the excerpt's power to shock the reader; students noted the efficacy of juxtaposing the intent of "our leaders" who discouraged such acts of violence with the reality of an actual event. Additionally, the class considered Kramer's own shift to a more emphatic, rhetorical tone after these sections and her increased use of the first person pronoun "I." Indeed, students noted that this shift also marked a turning point in the essay: Kramer spends most of the rest of the piece relating her own views concerning what drives racists acts of violence (fear and ignorance) and reporting on the shifts in her life that the terrorist attacks and aftermath prompted (stronger friendship with Zein, feeling "compelled to do something").

Finally, the class considered the somewhat predictable closing sentences which tried to raise further questions and return to the larger themes of the essay. Kramer concludes:

It seems that the country had never before been united together so closely as after September 11th. What, then, does this tell us about the current state of culture and society? Are we really "one nation, under god..." Or do we only unite when we have a crisis?

The Western World is a constantly changing machine, steadily moving forward in technology, in quality of life, and in culture. The terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11th changed all of that. In one morning, four airplanes changed America's quality of life and culture. Americans believed its country was invulnerable to an attack. We believed we were better than everyone else.

"The World has changed" was a view frequently expressed after the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Yet while the world of a great many people has changed, the world itself has not. It remains racist and unpredictable.

Americans may some day learn of tolerance, however; until this day comes, we will continue to be “without liberty” and “without justice to all.” (4-5)¹⁹

Although the class, myself included, was intrigued by several of the questions Kramer raises – do we only “unite when we have a crisis,” and do we believe we are “better than everyone else,” and if so, how do these intersect with our reactions to September 11th – we were disappointed by the predictable concluding language of “steadily moving forward in technology” and “Americans may some day learn...” We agreed that Kramer’s revision had successfully begun to make connections between her experience and the larger cultural and political environment and that the hybridity of her text assisted her in those juxtapositions. But our workshop thought that thinking through the various parts, narratives, observations, and questions Kramer had brought together – how they fit and how they productively grated against one another – would be essential to engaging the significant questions of the essay without resorting to familiar platitudes and rhetorically safe resolutions.

Taking our workshop suggestions as goals to encourage all students to complicate their essays through revision, I developed two multi-tiered exercises to support our in-class conversations. The first was a reading exercise asking students to go back to Didion’s essay and puzzle through the specific work that several of the excerpts she deploys contribute to the work as a whole: What do excerpts of embedded text show or allow that the more narrative prose of the piece does not? How has the excerpt been excerpted – where and why does it begin and end? How are excerpts contextualized, explained, or questioned? Asking students to get inside Didion’s piece to figure out what textual hybridity offered the essay as a whole was one way, I thought, to help students consider how they could use multiple texts and discourses in their own revisions to convey a sense of “their time and place.” I followed this exercise with a corollary reflexive exercise where students answered similar questions in response to their own essays. For example, those students who chose the second revision option and constructed a hybrid essay were asked to do the following: describe what each embedded textual excerpt contributes and how the essay prepares readers encounter it, provide a rationale for the type and amount of text embedded, and

¹⁹ Texts are reproduced as they appeared on the page, without corrections.

consider the patterns the incorporated texts show (consistently used for the same rhetorical or stylistic purpose or not?). Students then swapped their reflections and performed a peer review answering the same questions.

A second exercise I employed was assigning a short essay-collage, which asked students to select a pivotal moment in their lives when something “shifted” and compose an essay about that shift using at least three “artifacts” and only ten sentences. In addition to asking students to select a scene or moment that changed the way they thought of themselves and their world (thus perhaps questioning whether the large-scale societal events they had easily included in their essays were actually the most significant events to them), a central goal of this assignment was to force students to more carefully select any elements that would position their text as hybrid. Moreover, in limiting how much students could “tell” about their artifacts or the moment they were depicting, I hoped to force them to both rely on carefully chosen artifacts or excerpts and to carefully craft their sentences to best effect, something we had been working on throughout the term.

For many students, including Beth Kramer, this assignment allowed a richer sense of juxtaposition and textual hybridity – its purposes, effects, and possibilities – to emerge. Kramer’s essay-collage addressed her experiences as an aspiring model in her youth and used definitions, narrative, cultural critique, images of both herself and other models, history, poetry, and even Aristotle (excerpted below.) Although there is much here that could be productively opened up and investigated, Kramer’s essay-collage is discursively richer, contextually denser, and more suggestive in terms of its inquiries than her longer essay. In her second attempt at a hybrid essay, Kramer’s essay-collage is unpredictable and surprising – contemplative and even humorous at times. Consider the first page of her collage-essay below:



Figure 2: Hybrid Collage-Essay

In the beginning of this essay-collage, Kramer takes up the complexities of the modeling world, feminine beauty, aesthetics, and the ways women alter their bodies to better fit into particular images and discourses. Particularly effective are the juxtapositions Kramer makes to draw out the ironies between both the pictures and the words of her collage. She powerfully juxtaposes, for instance, several images of emaciated models with two images of herself (here somewhat altered for her anonymity.) The photographs of Kramer – one more posed than the other, seemingly more natural and playful pose – ironically foreground her healthy, yet both performative and somewhat naïve bodily presence. Given these strategies, even when the collage moves toward resolving a bit too easily – a tendency the students in class had also noticed in her long essay – the juxtaposition of all of its parts does not allow simplistic or pat conclusions due to the specific materials chosen. In short, for a first draft I saw a deeper intellectual

engagement manifested through the essayistic quality of this hybrid text than that which still ran beneath the surface in her longer essay and ran even deeper still in her essays grounded in academic discourse.²⁰

It is my contention that assignments such as those I've offered above not only introduce students to a broader range of genres and discourses which in turn allows them to attend to their rhetorical choices, but also provide rich ground for the discussion of assumptions about authorial intent, "meaning", and reading and writing as interpretative processes. As students noted in their reflections on working with the Didion assignments across several drafts, they began to notice "how much the essay is up for interpretation." As one student wrote in reflecting on the collage assignment: "As the author you have to be careful at what you pick out and present, because by allowing the reader to see an artifact, you are allowing them to reach their own conclusions and ideas, possibly completely different from the author's original intension [sic]."²¹ Such comments illustrate a questioning of previous assumptions and a grappling with how meaning is made. Eventually, such class conversations allow us to talk about language as one of the frames on our world, shaping how we think and how we know. This broader view was particularly useful when the course returned to assignments which demanded academic discourse. After this series of assignments students were better able to consider academic discourse as one among many types of discourse. After these assignments students were also more adept at articulating the expected conventions of particular genres and situations, as well as the effect these conventions might have in shaping what it was they wanted to say.

The realizations students had about discourse and genre as a result of the hybrid essay assignments extended to their reflections on the essay and its possibilities. Students described the pressure and potential of writing essayistically, noting especially the ways that writing essays made them

²⁰ It is of course difficult to pinpoint exactly what allowed this student to create a much more meaningful and complex essay. Although I'd like to believe that at least part of this success was due to the cohesive and reflexive structure of the course combined with a second attempt to write a hybrid essay, other factors might also reasonably be responsible, including that this second assignment may have convinced students that I was serious about accepting such forms of writing as intellectually rigorous.

²¹ I have left the misspelling of the word from this student's in-class reflection purposefully, for the "tensions" that it suggests between reader and "author" and the exchange of meanings and "intents." I am also interested by the slippage between the student positioning himself as the author in the first clause – engaged with a reader – and the subtle distancing of himself from the position of author in the last part of the sentence.

“be more skeptical than I initially was,” and to “rethink what I was trying to say...[and allow me to be] able to sort it out.” Although it might initially seem that the above struggles over controlling meaning (and thus transmitting their intent) would prompt students to try to control their “meanings” even more, the opposite was the case. Nearly all students reflected that in becoming more “thoughtful” through a full engagement with the essay they became more “creative and daring with my ideas.”

It seems that using the essay as a way to understand reading and writing as negotiations and as interpretative acts had the unexpected effect of freeing students from traditional assumptions about the direct transmission of intent. As theorist Eve Wiederhold suggests in her article “What do you Learn from What you See? Gloria Anzaldúa and Double-Vision in the Teaching of Writing,”

innovative style poses a challenge to comprehensive, coherent articulations of what writing is or should be...Asking readers to attend to the “the text” and the cultural strategies that direct how texts should be read effectively unsettles an entire structure that informs conventional understandings of how writing bears upon knowledge, reality, meaning, and communication. (110)

I’ve suggested through this series of assignments and my readings of Beth Kramer’s work one way that students can develop as readers and writers who are attentive to practices of interpretation and attuned to the ways writing “bears upon knowledge, reality, meaning, and communication.” Using Didion’s essays as a starting point, students participated in the type of critical pedagogy which asked them to engage the difficulties inherent in our worlds, as well as our ways of “reading” and responding to those difficulties.

Finding ways to open up aspects of larger assignments, practice particular techniques, and use the workshop as a collaborative conversation that can help all students further develop their essays and ideas was essential, I found, in preparing students for additional revisions. Moreover, teaching hybrid essays alongside more academic essays allowed students to expand their awareness of multiple genres, discourses, and stylistic strategies and to better negotiate the demands of specific assignments as well as their own intellectual projects. These intellectual projects, combined with our consistent reflection on the uses of writing and a recursive class structure that tied each assignment to earlier and future work, created

the intellectual arena of our shared classroom. Essential to this arena were both the hybrid and non-hybrid essays that students used to extend this arena in new, more critical, and more reflective directions over the course of the term.

Since much of this chapter has focused on Anzaldúa's hybrid essays as well, by way of conclusion I'll say a few words about using both essayists as well as suggest a few interconnections between questioning genre and responding to changes in literacy practices. In my reading of Beth Kramer's work above, I've argued that a semester trajectory which continually asks students to connect their own experience to the larger world in critical and thoughtful ways can be assisted by hybrid essay writing. Since the essay as a genre brings disparate ideas, experiences, and texts/discourses together, teaching the hybrid essay makes such juxtapositions visible and available for increased scrutiny. As I demonstrated with my student's hybrid essay, crafting specific assignments (often involving constraints or specific guidelines) supports more broadly imitative assignments. In combination, and in dialogue with essays more grounded in the conventions of academic discourse, these types of assignments challenge students to not only expand their awareness and use of multiple genres and discourses, but also allow them to focus more closely on the rhetorical and compositional choices they make in their writing.

Thus, the assignments I've described above that tackle Didion's hybrid essays can be thought of in terms of a semester trajectory in which students could productively move to critical reading and writing projects in conversation with Anzaldúa's hybrid essays. In dialogue with each essayist, students would be prompted to investigate their own ways of reading their worlds and their identities as well as the ways they write these observations and interpretations. The progression from Didion's work to Anzaldúa's imagines students as first engaged in reflexively "writing the self" and then moving to "write the world" in critical, complex ways. After turning their gaze inward, students can widen the lens to take into account the broader cultural moment in all of its complexity and contradiction. In some ways, this is a more predictable or familiar sequence for students who might feel a bit more grounded in slowly spiraling

out from the self given that much of the writing they may have been asked to do in the past focuses intimately on the self.

Another possible trajectory might reverse the process: funneling in toward the self and thus asking students to write an imitation prompted by Anzaldúa's essay before writing an imitation prompted by Didion's piece.²² Here, students might begin by reading and writing short, descriptive, sectional pieces, including prose poems. The construction and eventual juxtaposition and transition between these pieces of writing can help students to, first, highlight and negotiate the flexible nature of the essay in incorporating multiple discourses and genres and, second, to familiarize students with forms of writing they might not have previously encountered. Students might then move to gather textual excerpts and pieces of other's writing in a type of commonplace book exercise, noticing how these other texts can both represent and complicate how they might write about themselves. Writing about their multiple histories, selves, ties to populations, and their identities, students gain a different type of purchase with regard to how these identities are in dialogue with the larger world. An assignment asking students to then read Didion would attempt to emphasize this type of purchase through a more reflexive interrogation of the self and the "stories we tell ourselves in order to live."

Whether moving from the self to the world or vice versa, these two frequently anthologized essayists provide meaningful and substantial models of essay-writing that can assist students in increasing their awareness and use of multiple forms and types of writing with an eye toward purpose, audience, and the stylistic and rhetorical effects of their texts. Moreover, reading and writing the self and learning how to critically investigate experience, situating such experience in relationship to larger movements and moments within localized cultures, and using these texts to explore how language shapes what it is possible to think positions students as intellectuals through the process of writing. I hope I've also made clear that assignments which are in intimate dialogue with student writing and workshop discussion are

²² For a detailed and thoughtful account of responding to papers generated by the use of Anzaldúa's work in the first-year writing classroom, see also Bianca Falbo's "'La conciencia de la mestiza': Cultural Identity and the Politics of Personal Writing." Falbo provides several full drafts of her students' essays, along with her comments and commentary, in order to explore the value and limits of personal writing.

best poised to extend the work that students do and build on the intellectual projects they begin in their essays. In this way, teaching hybrid essays is much more than a fun “unit” or break from academic discourse, but a central strategy for developing a richer repertoire of writing strategies grounded in inquiry, critical thought, and reflexive revision.

Working with students on the reading and writing of hybrid texts also makes our own generic choices – and values – more visible and available for scrutiny. As Catherine Schryer argues in “Records as Genre,” “critical, dialectical analysis requires that researchers examine both the work that a genre performs and the work that it limits or prevents” (228). Such scrutiny of both the genres that are frequently used – as well as possible alternatives to these genres – creates opportunities to assess and develop the range of genres needed within a given discipline, profession, or communicative context. In applying such scrutiny to the literacy acts she was examining, Schryer concludes that, “In fact, if Bakhtin is correct, it is entirely possible that these students were being exposed to too narrow a range of genres. Bakhtin (1986) suggested that ‘the better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them...’(p.80)” (228). Schryer thus advocates that since the students she studied were taught “characteristic ways of speaking and writing in only a few genres and not those that encourage a range of addressivity,” increased critical scrutiny of genres should be combined with the teaching of a wider range of genres that would allow students to navigate and deploy a broader spectrum of genres to suit their purposes (228).

The practices I’ve suggested with regard to reading and writing hybrid essays dovetails with Schryer’s (and Bakhtin’s) insistence that access to a range of genres can assist students in not only expanding their rhetorical repertoires, but also assist in increasing genre awareness and the critical thinking skills necessary to support effective genre and rhetorical choices in diverse situations. Hybrid essays, I’ve argued, provide an especially apt site for enacting both of these types of work. They fulfill the commitment that Schryer articulates when she writes:

We need to teach our students to refuse simply to acquiesce to genres. As communicators, they need to be able to take them apart and see how they work and what they are actually doing or not doing within various communicative contexts” (230).

I agree. This chapter has pushed Schryer’s formulation (which grows out a particular context of veterinary schools) one step further, or one step broader. We need to teach our students to also be able to take thought itself apart – particularly the common sense, commonplace, easily commodified and distributed thought that is easy to pick up (in the world) and put down (in a paper) without a second thought. It is this second thought (and third and fourth) that I want to encourage and to mirror with parallel strategies that support the taking apart of language, genre, student texts and the texts of others to see how they work and to give them a second thought as well.

Although this is challenging work and work that most likely demands a broader range of pedagogical strategies, it is our job as teachers to respond to and innovate our own practices in response to student work. As I’ve shown in my analysis of typical anthology assignments for Didion and Anzaldúa, this is especially the case for teachers using textbooks and textbook assignments. Even a rich apparatus such as that found in *Ways of Reading* demands reflection and revision in response to the actual work students do, the actual writing they produce. Just as we ask our students to turn back to their work in order to make changes – to enact re-vision – so, too, we must turn back on our words and assignments not only at the end of the course, but throughout the semester and in dynamic dialogue with the work of the class. This is the work that students and teachers do together – the intellectual arena they create and that drives opportunities for learning forward.

The narration and analysis I’ve provided above concerning student work and assignment development provides one starting place for enacting such work. Moreover, I hope that my readings of both student and published essays have suggested the ways in which hybrid essays point to important changes in literacy practices. As I’ve argued in this chapter, it is my contention that teaching hybrid essays can assist students in further developing a range of rhetorical agencies. More broadly speaking, however, hybrid essays also begin to pose the questions we will need to continue to ask as our world and

our classrooms become increasingly technological and global. In this way, hybrid essays can act as transition or bridge texts that can help us answer such questions within a familiar textual space. These questions might include the following: What types of literacy practices and pedagogies will best serve our students in our changing world? What literacy practices are they already using? And how will we need to negotiate destabilized senses of such cornerstones of our field of study – audience, purpose, and a subject writing her way into the world, for example – in the face of these changing realities?

The next two chapters provide initial answers to these questions by moving beyond the printed page to texts that make use of visual elements: namely, photographic essays and essay-films. In each chapter, I consider the possible value of teaching hybrid essays that participate in the multiple modes and the visual rhetorics of photography and cinema. These chapters thus extend my contention that teaching hybrid essays allows students to develop a wider and more responsive repertoire of writing. Chapters Four and Five extend this claim by arguing that the construction of compositions with visual elements not only helps to create rhetorical and stylistic awareness but also supports engagement with issues of representation and the construction of texts more broadly.

4.0 INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS IN WORD AND IMAGE: THE CASE OF EDWARD SAID

I am gripped by a story which won't let me go. Outside the frame, I am film director, screenwriter, camera operator. Inside the frame, I am the actors – male and female – I am desert sand, mountain, I am dog, mosquito.

- Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*

...the irreducible pleasure of putting pen to paper with black ink is a way of trying out thought, or expressing ideas, of trying to reach people I otherwise couldn't reach. In a certain way, it's a refusal of the silence that most of us experience as ordinary citizens who are unable to effect change in a political and economic society that is obviously moved by larger forces than individuals.

-Edward Said, in interview with Jacqueline Rose¹

The above epigraph from Anzaldúa's chapter "Path of the Red and Black Ink" details the construction of a story, a story so powerful it "won't let me go." The writer that Anzaldúa describes occupies both the outside frames of construction – directing, organizing, and framing narratives – and the inside frames of identity and performance. Both frames then extend – as the second epigraph describes – to other people, other audiences. In the last chapter, I suggested several ways that writing students could begin to use the essay to achieve a similar oscillation between discourses, between ways of thinking and understanding, between world and self. This chapter considers a multimodal text composed by Edward Said and Jean Mohr entitled *After the Last Sky*, a work which illustrates these oscillations in particularly powerful ways and, compared to much of Said's other work, has received much less critical attention. Consisting of both essayistic prose and photographic images, I argue that *After the Last Sky* functions as a complex, hybrid text driven by an essayistic impetus (an epistemological drive toward critical and reflexive knowledge via

¹ This interview is included in the volume edited by Paul Bové, *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*.

thinking in and through writing.) In addition to foregrounding what writing can and cannot do when held alongside photographs, these multimodal essays also suggestively illustrate how different modes of representation propose different types of meaning making and knowledge. Finally, I contend that the complexities of negotiating multiple modes demand different reader relationships to and expectations of essays and the collaborative meaning-making activities they engender. In this way, hybrid multimodal essays can prove exceptionally fruitful sites for students to refine their awareness of genre and style, as well as the possibilities (and limits) of representation.

As I have argued, part of the richness of the hybrid essays I explore in this dissertation emerges from the pressure they assert on rhetorical and generic relationships. In our contemporary world of technological mediation and global-interconnectedness, writers, their texts, and the audiences their texts reach continue to shift and widen. As teachers of composition, how can we best attend to the ways our students confront, interact with, and compose texts which extend beyond the printed page? As theorists, which literacy practices and modes of communication production and distribution demand our immediate, critical scrutiny? And how can broadening our horizon of attention in these directions impact both our pedagogies and our field?

The next two chapters centered on photographic essays and essay-films can help us think through these questions. Both types of essays use multiple modes of representation, expression, and communication to explore complex subjects and summon audiences from around the world. And all of the texts I will consider are connected to the world in the sense of what Edward Said calls “worldliness” – the interconnection between texts and the “existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events” (4). If, as Said argues, “The realities of power and authority – as well as the resistances offered by men, women, and social movements to institutions, authorities, and orthodoxies – are the realities that make texts possible, [and] that deliver them to their readers,” this chapter attends to the ways that a combination of modes – both verbal and visual – assists in making these realities visible, negotiable, and the subject of sustained intellectual inquiry.

4.1 AFTER THE LAST SKY

Published in 1985, *After the Last Sky* explores the complexities inherent in the state of Palestinian life through juxtaposing photographs alongside reflections, narratives, and critical analysis of the political and cultural difficulties that surround the exiled Palestinian population. The occasion for the composition of the text illustrates its worldly nature. In the “Introduction” to the project, Said relates the story of his suggestion that photographs of Palestine and the Palestinian people be hung in the United Nations conference hall in Geneva. At the time, Said was serving as a consultant to the U.N.’s International Conference on the Question of Palestine. The U.N. agreed to the proposal and Swiss photographer Jean Mohr was sent to capture the images. However, when it came time for the photographs to be displayed there was a distinct and unusual problem. Said writes:

The photographs he brought back were indeed wonderful; the official response, however, was puzzling and, to someone with a taste for irony, exquisite. You can hang them up, we were told, but no writing can be displayed with them. No legends, no explanations. A compromise was finally negotiated whereby the name of the country or place (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank, Gaza) could be affixed to the much-enlarged photographs, but not one word more. (3)

Given his taste for irony (a characteristic of the essay I will explore more fully later in this chapter) the “prohibition on writing” the U.N. presented was particularly striking for Said, who noted the general uncomfortable response to narratives or details concerning Palestinian life (although, of course, this should have been an aspect of the discussion at the Conference.)

After the Last Sky was the collaboration that emerged in the face of this episode. Choosing to confront the deluge of literature about Palestinians – most of it “polemical, accusatory, and denunciatory” – Said and Mohr relate that they decided to “use photographs and a text...to say something that hasn’t been said about Palestinians” (4). The creation of such a text demanded careful representational choices.

Said describes the construction of this type of text at some length, emphasizing its necessary hybrid nature:

Its style and method – the interplay of text and photos, the mixture of genres, modes, styles – do not tell a consecutive story, nor do they constitute a political essay. Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us. What I have quite consciously designed, then, is an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered....The multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. (6)

By combining a range of genres and modes, Said and Mohr are able to construct a text that begins to do justice to the diverse lived realities of Palestinians. This hybrid text seeks to acknowledge, Said contends, that “Whatever we are, we are dogged by our past, but we have also created new realities and relationships that neither fit simple categories nor conform to previously encountered forms” (5). Thus, the composition of *After the Last Sky* creates new possibilities (and hopefully new relationships) grounded in fresh interpretations of Palestine and its citizens.²

Central to sparking such new relationships are the different audiences the authors hoped to reach with this project. Jean Mohr writes that one commitment he brought to the project was the desire to extend beyond the small, mostly academic audience his previous photos of Palestinians had reached. Edward Said, already well-known as a literary theorist and visible as a public intellectual, also extended his thinking to a wider audience by connecting his geographical and cultural heritage to the divisive debates concerning the state of Palestine and its relationship to Israel. In this project, the terms of the discussion were not only political and argumentative, but were also more narratively driven. As I hope to show in this chapter, there is much in the text that a wider and more public audience can, and should,

² For a longer and somewhat different account of the text’s occasion and composition, although not substantively different, see also W.J.T. Mitchell’s interview with Said in Bové.

learn about the condition of Palestinians, the history of these people, and the experience of exile, particularly given current developments in the region. But there is also much to learn from the presentation of this text – lessons not only about Palestinians as a “dispersed national community,” but about what it means to represent such people and such experiences in both words and images.³

In choosing “essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression” to represent Palestinians, and in constructing a complex, interactive relationship between the text’s prose and its photographs, Said and Mohr investigate what it means to ethically represent others without reducing complexity to the “habitually simple” (6). These acts of representation – of writing, constructing, and assaying identity and relationships – forges new ground not only in terms of the depth the representations achieve, but in the technologies and epistemologies deployed to help shape the text. The first epistemology I examine in this chapter centers on the intellectual writing the essay. I describe Said’s commitment to the genre, as well as enumerate contemporary claims for extending the reach of the essay to multimodal composition. Next, I consider the theoretical relationship constructed by combining words and images within a hybrid essay, focusing particularly on the scholarship of W.J.T. Mitchell in order to argue for increased attention to the complex interaction between these textual elements. Finally, I investigate the specific interactions of word and image from sections of *After the Last Sky*, paying particular attention to the ways that Said and Mohr summon their audiences to confront the worldliness of the essay’s text.

³ It is worth noting that a clear attempt to make both the issues that *After the Last Sky* addresses and the form of the photographic essay available for student investigation exists in *Ways of Reading* as well as in *Ways of Reading: Words and Images*. In both first-year composition and in intermediate writing courses, I have also taught selections from *After the Last Sky* (as well as other photographic essays), in each case asking students to compose such multimodal essays of their own and reflect on what this type of composition can allow.

4.2 THE SHIFTING NATURE OF THE SUBJECT-AUTHOR: THE ESSAY AS INTELLECTUAL ENDEAVOR

It is no coincidence that Said turns to a series of collected essays as the medium to explore a subject as important as the Palestinian crisis. Indeed, Said has long been an avid practitioner of the genre, using it for both shorter explorations and longer book-length projects such as *The World, the Text, and the Critic* and *Beginnings: Intentions and Method*, two of his most acclaimed critical texts. As I argued with regard to Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*, Said also collects a series of critical essays in each of these books, as well as collecting a series of photographic essays in *After the Last Sky*.

Indeed, in each of these texts Said regularly refers to his scholarship as “essays” and many of his most intimate critics, as I will show below, understand his work primarily in this way. In the preface to the reprinted edition of *Beginnings*, for instance, Said notes the following about the critical response to the 1975 first printing of that text:

Most reviewers correctly noted that one symptom of the book's mode was its apparent uncertainty or hesitation between belles-lettres, on the one hand, and a kind of philosophical speculation on the other. We have seen that Hillis Miller's phrase for this uncertainty is “uncanny criticism.” My feeling now is that the style of *Beginnings*, both in the book's structure and its line of argument, was a hybrid language expressing a number of different things, all of them retrospectively significant to me, although urgent enough at the time. (xiv)

As I detailed in Chapter One, the essay is preeminently capable in precisely the ways that Said (and his reviewers) describe: sustaining uncertainty or hesitation, working discursively between multiple languages and oscillating between belletristic and philosophical discourses, and exploring ideas that are significant to both the writer, individually, as well as to the larger world. Since *Beginnings* is an inquiry into “beginnings” as states of mind –that connect to authors, audiences, forms of text (essays and novels, most particularly), ways of conceptualizing literary and theoretical study (secular and worldly criticism),

and exemplary thinkers (Conrad, Foucault, Vico) – the essay enables Said to position these relationships in productive tension to one another.

Said also explicitly refers to his criticism as essays in the introductory essay, “Secular Criticism,” that begins his 1983 book *The World, The Text, and the Critic*. Although many of the essays in this collection were first published in journals or presented as lectures, they coalesce in the book by their shared interest in the ways that particular thinkers and their texts effect a particular type of interaction with the world (“worldliness”). Indeed, Said turns directly to the essay in the book’s title essay to exemplify this concept. The nature of this title essay’s inquiry – and the inquiries played out on the larger scale of the book project – can be summed up with the following question Said poses: “Finally, is the essay a text, an intervention between texts, an intensification of the notion of textuality, or a dispersion of language away from a contingent page to occasions, tendencies, currents, or movements in and for history?” (51). Here we see the continuation of Said’s explorations in *Beginnings* through his scrutiny of intellectuals’ intervention in the world through texts. By positioning the essay in all of the above ways and exploring the implications of each throughout the collected essays, Said investigates the unexamined work of criticism, “finding and exposing things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine” (53). Said offers the essay as the genre best suited to this type of worldly criticism and to making visible the heretofore unseen.

More specifically, Said acknowledges his own understanding of the essay’s critical lineage by specifically referencing Georg Lukács “Soul and Form,” a text which, as I mentioned in Chapter One, Adorno also considers part of his theoretical heritage. Said emphasizes a few aspects of Lukács’ understanding of the essay that are useful for his project concerning the worldliness of texts: namely, the essay’s ironic disposition and its worldly nature. Said is drawn to the ironic nature of the essay, particularly in the ways that irony supports the essay’s ability to embody the acts and processes of criticism. Said, responding to Lukács example of Socrates’ ironic joining of the mundane and the profound questions of life, writes:

Thus the essay's mode is ironic, which means first that the form is patently insufficient in its intellectuality with regard to living experience and, second, that the very form of the essay, its being an essay, is an ironic destiny with regard to the great questions of life.

(52)

For Said, the essay's tendency toward irony makes possible the critical skepticism and ensuing intervention (albeit incomplete) in the world. This critical distance and ironic disposition allows the essay to assay the world in unconventional ways to approach greater truth and significance. And as I argued in Chapter One, this ironic distance enables writers of all levels to re-approach their words, their ideas, and their earlier work (including other less engaged "essays" they may have been asked to write) and submit this work to critical scrutiny as well.

Said's second emphasis with regard to Lukács is the essay's characteristic of worldliness. Said notes that since the essay not only evaluates something but also makes visible the processes of critical evaluation, it has contemporary significance in the world at large. Attention to the processes of thinking and judging propels the critic toward the larger world, Said contends, and makes the critic "responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts....criticism is worldly and in the world so long as it opposes monocentrism" (53). This claim is of course in tune with Said's lifelong struggle against the forces of mono and ethnocentrism; however, it is crucial to note that here Said posits the essay as a redemptive and reflexive genre best poised to counter such authoritative and limited thinking.

Thus, by ending the title essay "The World, the Text, and the Critic" with an explicit discussion of the essay as the genre for secular criticism, Said embraces the essay and his belief in its possibilities. Said is direct in his contention that the essay is the genre most suited to criticism, writing:

I hope it will not seem a self-serving thing to say that all of what I mean by criticism and critical consciousness is directly reflected not only in the subjects of these essays but in the essay form itself. For if I am to be taken seriously as saying that secular criticism deals with local and worldly situations, and that it is constitutively opposed to the

production of massive, hermetic systems, then it must follow that the essay – a comparatively short, investigative, radically skeptical form – is the principal way in which to write criticism. (26)

The essay's ability to navigate the local and the worldly – putting them both into dialogue and weighing the results and implications – coupled with its inherent investigative and skeptical disposition, allows it to challenge conventional and hermetic ways of thinking and knowing and thus advance the goals of secular criticism.

Critics taken by Said's rich body of work agree that the essay is undoubtedly Said's primary genre. Mustapha Marrouchi, for example, describes Said's intellectual investment in "the *essay form* [which for Said] plays a central role here insofar as it gives rise to an abstract way to narrate a story, this plight Said jealously calls 'his' story, a story which would be solely his" (original emphasis, 109). Marrouchi characterizes the traits of many of Said's essays by connecting them to familiar essayistic traits: versatility, the importance of the author's "voice" to stitch the parts of the essay together, and a type of ownership or personal connection by the author as an individual. Even as Said "jealously" owns the essay as abstract storytelling, the essay creates a space for the writer to offer his personal thoughts to the world by taking the reader through his or her thinking process. Marrouchi describes this process this way: "Primarily an urban genre, the essay form allows the author to use himself as a starting point for digressions on the mundaneness of everyday life, while dialoging with an educated, heterogeneous readership" (111). Ranging through neighborhoods, the essayist notices the particularities and meaningful, yet ordinary, details of existence; the essay supports the writer in gathering and weaving these fragments together, enhancing their interactivity and connection to the larger world.

The essay, as self-described by Said and as further described by the scholars who survey Said's work, is therefore in dialogue with the emphasis in Said's scholarship on the hybridity of both texts and cultures. Said argues that to acknowledge the intersections of cultures and their politics – often violent in nature – is to acknowledge the ways that "partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure; all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and

unmonolithic” (*Culture and Imperialism*, xxv). One way to draw on this hybridity is through the contrapuntal reading Said advocated; another way is through “writing back” to those voices, imperial and otherwise, which seek to silence this hybridity. Said’s use of the essay supports these intellectual and justice-oriented commitments. Said is dedicated to “retrieving the forgotten, to making connections among issues previously kept separate, to envisioning alternative courses of individual and collective action, and to disputing the official narratives or justifications” (Marrouchi, 221). As theorists Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia confirm, Said’s preferred genre of the essay allows him to “escape the bondage of tradition, because it emphasizes the personal while at the same time entailing a political dimension...the essay, more than any other form, liberates the worldliness of the writer,” and thus provides a productive mediatory form (132). As I also illustrated with Didion and Anzaldúa in the previous chapter, liberating the worldliness of the writer to enact both personal and political thinking, the essay connects the writer to the world and its realities.

In another way of putting this, Marrouchi notes that Said’s exile to America, a condition which informs his intellectual stance, also parallels his movement toward the essay. Said’s insistence on the public engagement of intellectuals in many ways dovetails with the textually hybrid world of the essay. Embracing the essay functions as a “move from genre to anti-genre [which] engages in cracking open the boundaries of language” (111). This cracking open also occurs for the exile, who gains a new, albeit often painful, perspective on the homeland through distance. In earlier chapters I’ve charted what is described here as the essay’s “cracking open” and anti-generic tendency: its openness to multiple discourses, languages, and structures; its self-reflexive, often self-implicating, element; and, its affinity for suturing together multiple genres to create provocative juxtapositions. Through these features of the essay, the intellectual can occupy Said’s chosen roles of both the amateur and the traveler – an individual moving between ideas, discourses, and new realities as a way of not only capturing the complex texture of the world, but as a way to heighten his or her critical purchase in response to this world by moving beyond familiar boundaries and reified (often institutional) ways of thinking. Since Said’s commitment to intellectualism depends upon not only critical questioning but also demands a community of critics to

serve as one of many audiences, the essay provides a useful form by which this texture of thought, speculation, and cultural situation can be juxtaposed and deployed to others.

4.3 CONNECTIONS AND COMMITMENTS: WHY SAID VALUES THE ESSAY

A bit more analysis is necessary to understand the particular type of essay that Said values and why he values it as he does. In many ways, Said's perception of his role as an intellectual and critic corresponds with Adorno's perception of the role of the essay (and the essayist) I detailed in Chapter One. Critic Ben Xu describes Said's investment in the role of the intellectual this way: to be an intellectual is to "remain forever skeptical of all forms of reification, doctrines, and institutions that constitute themselves as negations of praxis, objectifying human agents and their thinking, and alienating freedom" (31). The essay, as an intellectual praxis achieved through writing, embodies freedom and the integrity of the human subject through its commitment to holding discourses and ways of thinking side by side without abiding by the limits of genre or discipline.⁴ Both the essay and the intellectual, Adorno claims, must question and make visible method as a practice, instead of treating methodologies and disciplines as neutral and objective. The reliance on combination, juxtaposition, and critical skepticism allows Said's essays, like their author, to resist "pigeonholing; they both defy classification according to any of the clear-cut boundaries that shape modern academic discourse" (Marrouchi, 111). To remain outside these

⁴ Though outside the scope of the present study, much important work has been written on Said's relationship and commitment to humanism, especially in response to his final posthumous publication, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. For a particularly helpful resource that puts Said's humanism at the center of its project, see the recent text *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation*, edited by Homi Bhabha and W.J.T. Mitchell. Said defines humanism as "the achievement of form by human will and agency," forms which are situated, as well as politically and historically engaged (quoted in "Humanism After Theory; or, the Last Words of Edward Said." *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*. 27: (2005), 87-93.) I recover this definition here to put it in dialogue with other premises of this dissertation – that language participates in shaping individuals and individual thoughts, that identity is not singular but multiplicitous – so that a productive tension is stretched between what writers might accomplish in the composition process and the number of forces, both internal and external, that contribute to this dynamic. Along these lines, see also Said's description of philological humanism and its relationship to reading practices in his chapter on Leo Spitzer in *Humanism*.

boundaries is to remain in critical dialogue with ways of knowing that can always – especially within institutions, Adorno notes – become reified.

The essay thus becomes a key way of renewing intellectual commitment and a way of surviving as an intellectual through the practice of writing. The essay as

writing practice goes far beyond the critic positing himself as judge and jury, as canon maker. It asks ideological, linguistic, ethical questions while declaring itself susceptible; it reveals the restlessness of moving around, the constant breaking up of boundaries, both textual and territorial. (Marrouchi, 111)

Said and Adorno both believed in the value of challenging received knowledge and disciplinary borders while submitting the fruits of this labor to critical scrutiny as well. In order to call into question received ways of knowing and perceiving, the essay's metacritical power extends even to ideology, to language, to the ground of ethics. Said's metaphor of moving around in the fashion of a traveler combines with his focus on the amateur – similar to Adorno's naïve student – who can assess the boundaries of thought and accepted methods with fresh eyes.⁵

The comparison I've made between Said and Adorno and their conceptions of the essay is no coincidence, given that Adorno serves as one of Said's central examples of an intellectual. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said expressly notes Adorno as an exemplary public intellectual, as well as acknowledging Adorno's influence on Said's own formation as both an intellectual and an essayist. In relationship to Adorno, Said's emphasis remains similar to that discussed above: Adorno is a key example of an intellectual-essayist through his ability to leave space in the mind for doubt, for skepticism, and for an ironic purchase on the idea or object being scrutinized.

⁵ For an account and critique of Said's claim for the intellectual as an amateur, see Jeffrey William's article "Romance of the Amateur Intellectual" which argues that Said's amateur intellectual functions primarily as a literary and romantic trope and as a rationale for Said's own professional choices.

Given this lineage to both Adorno and Lukács, it is thus understandable that Said turns to the essay.⁶ But what is it precisely about the form that Said finds so congenial? First, I argue that it is the way that the essay can exceed the conventions of other genres and ways of thinking, sustaining antimonies and extending its criticism to the world. Particularly since from the very outset of *The World, the Text, and the Critic* Said sets going “over and above” the predominant types of literary criticism as his task, the essay provides a genre outside the types of criticism he finds insufficient. The secondary role that criticism is usually thought to play – coming after and acting in service of another text or work of art – is rejected by the essay since the essay creates a “dialectic of engagement in time and the senses, the paradoxes in a text by which discourse is shown to be immutable and yet contingent, as fraught and politically intransigent as the struggle between dominant and dominated” (51). Writing, especially through this triad’s chosen form of the essay, enacts these struggles since the writing of a text “is the present in the course of its articulation, its struggles for definition” (51). For Said, as for Adorno, these acts of definition are not scientifically procedural but deeply intellectual and charged with the worldliness outside the text. Said argues that “the critic cannot speak without the mediation of writing”; it is the essay that, for Said as for many other public intellectuals, provides the ideal form for potent and engaged secular criticism (51).

Second, Said chooses the essay because it can take an oppositional stance and therefore have a kind of power in the world. In “Secular Criticism,” Said sounds much like his early mentor, Adorno, when he describes the essay’s traits as grounded in “suspicion of totalizing concepts,” “discontent with reified objects,” and “impatience with guilds, special interests, imperialized fiefdoms, and orthodox habits of mind” (29). Said is particularly invested in the essay not only because of these critical epistemologies but also because of the way the essay so deeply adopts and illustrates these epistemologies; he describes the essay as a site where “all of what I mean by criticism and critical consciousness is directly reflected

⁶ To further map Said’s particular lineage, see also Timothy Brennan’s recent piece “Edward Said: American Politics and the Theory of Knowledge,” which draws connections to Said’s influence by both Adorno and Lukács and argues that Said’s inter-generational position between such thinkers is part of what allowed his work to be so influential and important.

not only in the subjects of these essays but in the essay form itself” (26). In this way, the essay is particularly conducive for intellectual work and the secular criticism that Said describes. Through the essay, such criticism can be “always situated; it is skeptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failings” (26). In juxtaposing multiple discourses and submitting its method to critical scrutiny, the essay is also inhospitable to the paralyzing effects of over-specialization, disciplinary isolation, and jargon-ridden professional discourses.

Third, the essay’s constellational style seems to exemplify the commitments that Said explored throughout his career. Said’s descriptions of the essay, for example, have much in common with his dense explorations concerning the importance of beginnings in his collected essays published under that title. Said describes the relationship between inquiry and writing that *Beginnings* explores this way:

I undertook, however, to let it [the topic of beginnings] make possible a system of relationships, a field or constellation of significance in which my writing moved...The logic of exposition I follow is not precursive; that is, my exposition follows no course determined in advance by convention, imitation, consecution, or thematic. The form of writing I chose was the meditative essay – first, because I believe myself to by trying to form a unity as I write; and second, because I want to let beginnings generate in my mind the type of relationships and figures suitable to them. (16)

The way Said describes his intellectual endeavors grounded in essayism resonates with many of the descriptions I’ve accumulated in this dissertation thus far. Said rightly notes that the essay does not dictate its course beforehand, but takes advantage of a constellation of meditations in order to arrive at its own, most appropriate structure. In this way, the essay is both critical and generative.

Lastly, Said seems to favor the essay because he contends that criticism, itself, receives the benefits of the ongoing and critical beginnings the essay helps to sustain. Critical essays gain their power by a “constant re-experiencing of beginning and beginning-again whose force is neither to give rise to authority nor to promote orthodoxy but to stimulate self-conscious and situated activity, activity with aims non-coercive and communal” (xiv). This experience of beginning and beginning again – of finding

one's way through thought to understanding – positions the writer as flexible, reflective, and intimately connected to thinking through the act of writing. Writing is not merely instrumental to generating, testing, and concentrating thought, but writing acts instead as the non-objectifying method of enacting thought and connecting it to the world. The writer whose writing is “perpetually at the beginning,” as Said calls it, is intimately involved in thinking in and through the world: she writes to “take[...] up a subject in order to begin it, keep it going, create it” (74; 11). These acts of invention, reflection, and re-beginning constitute the writer's intention and what Said calls an intellectual appetite. The essay carries these intentions creatively – in terms of both “making” and “originality” – into the world.

4.4 WORDS AND IMAGES: CALLS FOR MULTIMODALITY

Susceptible, impatient, and on the move, the essays I focus on below in *After the Last Sky* contain the heightened restlessness and rich texture Said gathers as an essayist-traveler. These essays embody the descriptions Said provides of the essay's capacity for intellectual thought, secular criticism, and worldly connectedness. Yet these essays also introduce new relationships between thought and experience particularly through their movement between word and image. As W.J.T. Mitchell contends, it is during “moments of inadequacy” where coherent discourse and representation fail or do not exist. In ways similar to the essays I've discussed by Didion and Anzaldúa, I argue that Said's *After the Last Sky* capitalizes on such inadequacy through representational and stylistic innovation. Mitchell refers to this innovation in terms of the text's worldliness writing, as I explore more fully below, that hybrid, multimodal texts such as photographic essays emerge as “a historical necessity” (321). Faced with the question and condition of Palestine and Palestinians, this historical necessity is one addressed with commitment, complexity, and affection by Said and Mohr. The means they use to present their arguments – the combination of word and image in a hybrid essay – gestures not only to the difficulties of such representation, but to the changing commitments and interests of readers and writers. Even if we are

not all exiles, it is perhaps through texts that we are all travelers in an unstable, swiftly changing, globalized world.

In the next two sections, I take up Mitchell's claim about such "moments of inadequacy" which can frequently result in the stretching of generic and representational conventions. These explorations are in dialogue with theorists working within the emerging domains of visual and multimodal literacy who have specifically turned their attention to these moments and their results. Advocates for multimodal literacy not only press for multiple ways of understanding and composing texts, but argue for the production of texts that make use of a range of modes (verbal, visual, aural, etc.) As the availability and prevalence of technologies increase, predictably so do arguments that students are best prepared to engage the world (and often the global marketplace) by practicing composition across modes of representation and communication.

Calls for multimodality come from a range of advocates: teachers, theorists, employers, and students themselves.⁷ A leading scholar of multimodal theory, Gunther Kress has written copiously on what multimodal composition means as part of his work with the New London Group and in dialogue with digital culture theorists George Landow and Richard Lanham. Kress has argued convincingly that new modes and genres (as well as combinations of the two) afford composers a "new communicational world" where heretofore unimaginable choices are now not only possible, but the norm. Other scholars such as Charles Hill also question the assumptions that many compositionists continue to hold, including the beliefs that the visual and verbal can be separated out from one another and/or replace the work each does – arguments which Hill claims seek to elide the power of the visual (and thus our responsibility to teach it) despite the ubiquity of images in our world.

In the face of these assumptions, the pressures of burgeoning technology, and the recognition of multiple literacies many teachers might voice similar anxieties to Geoffrey Sirc, who writes that the

⁷ See Cynthia L. Selfe's work, particularly *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*, for a broad history of calls for education to address issues of technology and multimodality, especially including the arguments advanced by policymakers. Selfe charts the roles of each of these constituencies, as well as paying substantial attention to the role of government in creating the Technology Literacy Challenge under the Clinton administration.

rapid advance of technology has meant a pedagogical dilemma for me: just what do I do in the classroom, what do I teach? Is the essay still our central genre? Do our students do Web sites? Do we teach html? Email as a genre? Where do we go? (111)

In the face of these questions, some compositionists such as Craig Stroupe argue that teachers within the field, and the field itself, will need to shift both practices and mindsets:

The practice and teaching of this hybrid literacy will require that those of us in English studies reexamine our customary distinctions and judgments about literacy in light of this historical challenge of the visual – not just in the extracurricular, top-down media of television and film, but in the more commonly accessible media of textual production and academic communication. (609)

Ann Wysocki concurs, advocating an increased focus on materiality: of specific media, of the texts we create using those media, and on the material “thinking of people who teach writing” (3). In the case of these scholars, multimodality isn’t merely a fad that will pass but the nature of our world in the present moment. Nearly everything around us is constructed in various modes; most texts we encounter are already multi-genre, multi-modal, hybrid configurations; historically, this has been the case more than we might realize⁸; and it is not only practical but responsible for us to attend to these materialities in our classrooms.

I am in agreement with many of these claims. As I’ve argued in the previous chapter, I am committed to my students writing across genres, across discourses, and across modes and doing so with attention and reflexivity to the choices they are making. In the sections below, I will elucidate some of my particular reasoning for the importance of teaching a text that combines the verbal and the visual which result in a text that is stronger and more powerful than if one of these modes was not included. And I will demonstrate how those teachers who might be anxious about moving in this direction, or those who might have limited technology at their disposal, can still attend to the basic epistemological

⁸ See Catherine Hobbs’ essay “Learning from the Past: Verbal and Visual Literacy in Early Modern Rhetoric and Writing Pedagogy” in Fleckenstein, Calendrillo, and Worley.

questions that the scholars I've cited above endorse. In order to impart the forcefulness of these claims however, I'd like to offer just a few snippets of the broader context these thinkers provide in arguing for multimodal composition. These quotations provide, I think, an important sense of why we might need to widen our perspective beyond the printed text at each of the levels most important to us in order to acknowledge the contexts that shape our contemporary moment and our contemporary students. These contexts exist:

At the level of the classroom:

Classroom practice which ignores the increasingly visual, localized qualities of information exchange can only become increasingly irrelevant. Influenced especially by the growth of electronic media, strategies of rhetorical organization will move increasingly toward visual patterns presented on screens and interpreted through visual as well as verbal syntax...We can learn from such studies [of "actual texts as they function in particular contexts"] how successful texts are composed and what part schools can play in encouraging students to become able, creative composers. (Stephen A. Bernhardt, 105)

At the level of the department:

To suggest that the loose confederation of scholarly and teaching interests called English studies should consciously visualize itself in these new terms is to argue that those at the discipline's prestigious center follow the lead of its more marginalized or controversial wings: technical communication, cultural studies, film, and popular culture. To pursue such a course would thus lead English to address its internal inequalities through this self-visualization and to recognize the mystified status of the privileged genres, discourse, and cultural narratives on which these inequalities rest. (Craig Stroupe, 610)

At the level of the University:

In the academy we are prisoners of the same inert patterns of thinking that have dominated the rest of American corporate enterprise. There is nothing "futuristic" about trying to break out of these patterns; it is the most insistent present one can possibly imagine. It will be our own fault, not the fault of our founders, if we continue to imitate the Post Office and worry about moving letters around in an electronic way, when it is not only the delivery system but the "letters" themselves which have fundamentally changed. (Richard Lanham, 163)

And, at the level of education most broadly:

The profound cultural diversity of all contemporary "Western" post-industrial societies, as much as the new demands for education for participation in a fully globalized economy, has specific

educational consequences. It means that an “outcomes-based curriculum” or, to use a better formulation, a curriculum which focuses on skills, disposition, essential processes, and understanding of resources for representing and communicating, may be what all of “us” in the Anglophone and ever more globalizing world will need to consider urgently....I am not here thinking of the facile and deeply mistaken ideas around skills-training, but focusing rather on giving students a full awareness of what might be possible, beyond both the suggestions of current politics and the seductions of the market-led consumption. Such an education would provide them with the means both for setting their goals and for achieving them in the contexts of their lives. (Gunther Kress, *Multimodality, Multimedia, and Genre*, 52)

4.5 SHIFTING PURPOSES: THE INTERACTION OF WORD AND IMAGE

As I’ve begun to argue above, the relationship *After the Last Sky* establishes between image and word necessitates more thorough consideration. As W.J.T. Mitchell writes in his now canonical *Picture Theory*, language and image inter-interpret one another in dynamic and complex ways. It is thus important to attend to the ways that such modes function in hybrid texts of all kinds. Mitchell turns explicitly to the photographic essay as a place where verbal and visual forms of representation interact and create an “emergent form of mixed, composite art” – a place where “images and words find and lose their conscience, their aesthetic and ethical identity” (281). Creating a complex image/text, the relationship between word and image is non-hierarchical; neither gives final illustrative, narrative, or explanatory “meaning” to the other, but each contributes instead to the “dialectic of exchange and resistance” (287).

For Mitchell, as for Said, the essay is the “especially privileged mode” for bringing these elements together, due particularly to the essay’s penchant for “formal incompleteness” (287). Mitchell writes that:

The generic incompleteness of the informal literary essay becomes an especially crucial feature of the photographic essay’s relations of image and text. The text of the photo-

essay typically discloses a certain reserve or modesty in its claims to “speak for” or interpret the images; like the photograph, it admits its inability to appropriate everything that was there to be taken and tries to let the photographs speak for themselves or “look back” at the viewer. (287)

This modesty extends to the interaction between word and image, Mitchell argues, in that each medium “looks back” at the other instead of forcing itself over and above the other. Thus, image and word must exist equally, they must have an element of independence from the other, and yet they must at the same time collaborate (288).⁹ These three descriptions of the relationship between word and image – equality, independence, and collaboration – serve as the hallmarks of Mitchell’s theory of dynamic image/texts. These three characteristics moreover distinguish a photographic “essay” from other types of representation that merely contain pictorial and verbal elements.

In his chapter dealing explicitly with the photographic essay, Mitchell uses *After the Last Sky* as one of four key case studies illustrative of these theories. Mitchell rightly notes that the prose and photographs of the text are “consistently governed by the dialectic of *exile* and its overcoming, a double relation of estrangement and re-unification” (308). Although exile is at the core of the text, the estrangement and reunification Mitchell marks can also usefully describe the distance and coming together of word and image, prose and photograph. Sometimes reinforcing one another, sometimes acting independently to posit multiple possibilities, sometimes challenging one another in provocative juxtaposition, Mitchell asserts a very similar claim to Said’s statement that attention must be paid to the form and structure of such interactions:

This “form” is not something distinct from content; it *is* the content in its most material, particular sense, the specific places it carves out as the site of Palestinian

⁹ Mitchell’s key example is, of course, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a text which exhibits *equality* in that Evan’s photos exist separately and *independently* from Agee’s text, each “constituting an essay in their own right” (289). Word and image *collaborate* to create a richer essay-portrait of Depression-era subjects than either section alone would allow since each element intensifies the complex, sometimes discordant and dense, representations – each serving as a type of continuous “conscience” or corrective to the other and the ways it might be simplified (296).

existence...insisting on the ethical as well as aesthetic relation of text and image. (original emphasis, 310)

For Mitchell, as for Said and Mohr, the form of the essay becomes crucial not only to representing the reality of existence and exile but to embodying the relationship between the two in order to necessitate recognition of the material, ethical, political, and historical dimensions of the Palestinian situation. (In fact, Mitchell also describes the collected chapters that constitute *Picture Theory* as “essays.”)

Given these representational demands, Mitchell’s broader project is an attempt to assay the aesthetic and ethical, formal and experimental characteristics of the photographic essay in a manner that does not stultify or reify the genre. Although Mitchell sees the photographic essay as a relatively new genre, he argues that it is nonetheless one to which we must attend given the particularly powerful demands and entreaties it makes of its readers. Mitchell’s commitment to the photographic essay as achieving a different type of work than solely textual essays exists in his response to a question posed by *After the Last Sky*. Citing Said’s observation that “there is no completely coherent discourse adequate to us, and I doubt whether at this point, if someone could fashion such a discourse, we could be adequate for it,” Mitchell responds with an assertion similar to my argument in the previous chapter: “It is at such moments of inadequacy, perhaps, that a mixed, hybrid discourse like that of the photographic essay emerges as a historical necessity” (321). Necessitated by occasion, by a commitment to multi-faceted representation, and by the belief that people must speak for themselves as well as being spoken for, *After the Last Sky* is purposely hybridized to create the powerful essay I trace more fully below.

Highlighting this hybridity and interactivity between word and image, the words of Said’s text often call attention to their own instability, their limited ability to convey such rich, interpenetrated meanings. To come closest to relaying something about the status of Palestinian life, Said’s prose not only partners with images, but also seeks out a range of genres and excerpts, suturing them together through the flexible essay form. Drawing together such discourses – excerpts from bureaucratic reports and official recommendations, conversations with cab drivers and childhood friends, interviews made by Israeli media of so-called Palestinian terrorists, descriptions of film, media, and novelistic representations,

ethnographies of Palestinians by Finnish anthropologists, historical charts depicting stages of colonization, poems by the Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish and poems by Yeats – necessitates a sometimes fluid, sometimes purposely disjunctive, essayistic impulse. Readers must negotiate the many snippets of information, absorbing and weighing, comparing, complicating, seeking to understand.

The inserted images by Jean Mohr within the essay supplement and complicate this effect. Although the prose of the essay occasionally refers to or acknowledges the images, more often the images contribute independently to the effect of the piece – neither “displaying” what the prose says or relying upon the prose to “explain” significance or relation. As Said writes about the photo of a woman he later discovers he knows: “She is a real person – Palestinian – with a real history at the interior of ours. But I do not know whether the photograph can, or does, say things as they really are. Something has been lost. But the representation is all we have” (84). This tension between word and image – a productive and complex relationship that functions differently than explanation or exposition – exists as a key feature of the essayistic impulse of *After the Last Sky*. As critic Mustapha Marrouchi describes the relationship, Mohr’s images appear “in the narrative, but do not say who they are; they carry within themselves complete, real autobiography, a mixture of the imaginary and the fictitious” (117).

These tensions – between non-fiction and fiction, between modes of representation, between what has been permanently lost and what can be recovered – are maintained and scrutinized by the interaction of word and image within the essay. Indeed, the essay provides a hospitable genre for the exploration of tensions such as these through its ability to gather, weigh, and contemplate thought. Here, the intellectual arena extends beyond the thinker/writer to include the thinker/photographer. And since the purpose of the essays in *After the Last Sky* is to confront the discontinuities of exile, of dislocation, and of difference Said and Mohr must turn to a genre which can most ethically and most responsibly provide insight. The hybrid, multi-modal essays they construct extend the purview of both writing and photography through their dynamic combination; moreover, the method of constructing such a rich hybrid does justice to the rich complexities Palestinians encounter and that the authors seek to present to a wider audience.

As I've shown in this section, it is clear why Said and Mohr chose this form of the essay as the means by which the lives of Palestinians can more fully and more responsibly be brought into view. Given the tensions the hybrid photographic essay creates – between estrangement and unification, for example – and the values of equality, independence, and collaboration implicit in the interactions between word and image, the essay affords a structure within which to achieve diverse purposes. As I show in the following and final section of this chapter, the specific interactions of word and image combined with the techniques of address that Said and Mohr employ create a text which explicitly summons broadly situated and widely dispersed audiences.

4.6 SHIFTING THE AUDIENCE: EXTENDING THE ESSAYISTIC IMPETUS

As part of the desire to reach a larger audience, the Said/Mohr essays explicitly summon and include the reader at particular moments. This desire to include the reader, as I will show below, extends beyond wanting to inform to other communicative purposes as well: to acknowledge, to complicate, to challenge, and even to implicate. Although significant portions of the text's audiences may be unfamiliar with the places Said and Mohr document, readers undeniably have some familiarity with the strife present in the region. Thus, many audiences might approach *After the Last Sky* with a type of unfamiliar familiarity – a knowledge of Palestine and Palestinians that has been broadly disseminated, but does not reach very deep. The images and descriptions of Palestine and its people are, as Said rightly notes, often nothing more than recycled stereotypes, a simulacra of life in this region that does not do justice to the lived experiences or material realities of its people.

The summoning of the audience occurs most directly and powerfully in the juxtaposition of words and images – a juxtaposition which occurs nearly on every page. Thus, although Said never directly describes the four sections that constitute the book as essays, it is my contention that these

sections are among the most essayistic of Said's body of work.¹⁰ However, here the essayistic impulse is not only present in the words on the page, but also in the rich interaction between words and images that I've described in the previous section.

Take for example the conjunction of image and prose in the essay "States" that grapples with Palestinian identity. Opening the text to the opposing pages 36 and 37, the reader encounters two images which both contain an adult and a young girl of about the age of four or five. The adults look elsewhere, but both girls eye the photographer and thus the viewer: one shyly, one inquisitively. The layout of the spread locates the images diagonally across from one another, creating an axis along which the viewer's eyes travel. Thus, even as the reader moves to the text below the image on page 37 – text in which Said describes finding one's place within a world constantly focused on erasure of the population to which you belong – it is difficult to remain solely focused on the description. Reading bits of sentences – descriptions of the "ephemera...we negotiate with, since we authorize no part of the world" – the reader's eyes cannot help floating up to take in the refugee writing a letter to her husband imprisoned elsewhere, the stare of the little girl, the direct implication of someone looking back across the page.

As the reader turns the page to the next prosaic vignette, Said's description pauses to focus on the search for form across Palestinian writing:

The striking thing about Palestinian prose and prose fiction is its formal instability: Our literature in a certain very narrow sense *is* the elusive, resistant reality it tries so often to represent. Most literary critics in Israel and in the West focus on what is said in Palestinian writing, who is described, what the plot and contents deliver, their sociological and political meaning. But it is the *form* that should be looked at...the struggle to achieve form expresses the writer's efforts to construct a coherent scene...Impelled by exile and dislocation, the Palestinians need to carve a path for themselves in existence, which for them is by no means a given or stable reality. (38)

¹⁰ Said typically refers to the four essays as "parts" or, less frequently, "chapters." In an interview with W.J.T. Mitchell entitled "The Panic of the Visual," for example, Said discusses arranging these parts based largely on the four (musical) motifs he perceived in that essay's photographs (17).

Here, writing becomes not only a way to represent the conditions of Palestinian identity and survival, but also a survival strategy in and of itself – a way for people to “carve a path for themselves.” Writing, in some ways, *is* the reality. This description recalls one of the images on the previous page where an adult writes as the child gazes back at the reader. As a further example, Said turns to a specific Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafani. Said describes the form of his fiction as enacting the reality of Palestinian life, writing that “Kanafani’s very sentences express instability and fluctuation – the present tense is subject to echoes from the past, verbs of sight give way to verbs of sound or smell, and one sense interweaves with another” (38). Such formal mirroring of material conditions thus serves as “an effort to defend against the harsh present and to protect some particularly cherished fragment of the past” (38). Said’s ability to talk about form in terms of phenomenology (sensual experience interweaving and shifting) allows form to also occupy an ontological space (form as *being* the reality). Form is ideological – grounded in history and inflected by politics – and epistemological: it acts as a way of knowing and prompts understanding. Moreover, this theoretical discussion is enacted by the text itself: as readers we move between our own senses and reactions to the images, descriptions, and experiences the text presents.

The movement between different modes of representation is tied, for Said and Mohr, to the ability to give voice to particular Palestinian stories. As Said mentions throughout the text, such voicing acts as a way of writing/creating a world which acknowledges Palestinian existence. As Said has claimed, “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (*Culture and Imperialism*, xiii). In the contested Arab world with shifting regimes of power, occupation, and varying nationalistic interests, narration serves as a central strategy for actualizing realities and making what Said calls the “small voices” of the world heard.

The search for the best way to relay such complex relationships is taken up in Mohr’s inserted photographs a few pages later in the essay. Here, the reader encounters a photograph of two older women peering into a car, relaying messages to be transported to relations in a Red Cross Refugee camp.

It is difficult not to be struck by the visual analogue of the inside/outside dichotomy the prose has been describing. “The insider becomes the outsider,” Said relays, as Palestinians are separated from other populations, a stable homeland, even from one another (40-1). Moreover, in relationship to the Israelis, Palestinians exist “at the periphery” as “the image that will not go away” (41). The image of the women highlights this dynamic; even though the relationship between Palestinian citizens is amiable, the framing of the photograph still positions the woman outside of the vehicle, separated from the man who is able to communicate with their relatives and bridge this distance. The women bend to peer through the car window, jostling to make themselves visible. They persist.

Said relates the women’s subtle insistence to *Bartleby*’s persistent literary claim, “that ‘we would prefer not to,’ not to leave, not to abandon Palestine forever” (42). On the subsequent page, these words lead into the next image, an image reminiscent of the previous image of the women bending into the car. In this photograph, a young boy presses his hand against a window as he peers inside; in the foreground, an Israeli officer’s contemplative face and hand emerge against the shadowy interior. Even more forcefully than the old women of the previous page, this boy persists in making himself present, dramatizing the desire to remain. Yet in addition to serving as a dramatization, the striking nature of the image – the juxtaposition of soldier and villager, the clear outside/inside dichotomy, the boy’s insistent and plaintive look directed at the viewer (in marked comparison to the officer’s downward and inward-focused gaze) – exists as its own rendering of the relationships between people, between worlds.

Such moments ask readers to move fluidly between prose and image, finding ways to make each “mean” in relationship to one another. The procedure is accumulative, but due to the difference in media the materials “accumulate” differently, pointing the reader in new, unexpected directions and demanding an open interpretative capacity. Images like the women by the car and the boy by the window echo each other in terms of their composition, highlighting ideas conveyed in the prose but also extending these ideas to create other possibilities for understanding.

The end of the essay “States” embodies this essayistic movement between word and image in depth. In fact, the conclusion to this essay most clearly employs the spirit of gathering as its means of

sifting through past recollections and present realities. The last two and a half pages begin with a dense image shot from a distance: series of stone steps and terraces lead to a stone house; a few distant figures can be made out from amongst the lush foliage that borders the image. The narrator describes the image this way:

This image of four people seen at a distance near Ramallah, in the middle of and yet separated from thick foliage, stairs, several tiers of terraces and houses, a lone electricity pole off to the right, is for me a private, crystallized, almost Proustian evocation of Palestine. (47)

The image is dense and layered; the reader, like Said, must work to discern both its features and their significance. Pointing out the lush image bursting with competing signs and imagery, the narrator ultimately situates this image within his own private imagination. Without a transition, he jumps into an imaginative mode of recollection:

Memory: During the summer of 1942 – I was six – we rented a house in Ramallah. My mother took me to a variety show at the local Friends school. During the second half I left the hall to go to the toilet, but for reasons I could not (and still do not) grasp, the boy-scout usher would not let me back in. I recall with ever renewed poignancy the sudden sense of distance I experienced from what was familiar and pleasant...all at once the rift introduced into the cozy life I led taught me the meaning of separation, of solitude, and of anguished boredom. (48)

Situating the experience of exile within a narrative vignette from his youth, the narrator allows a sense of separation to unfold before the viewer by highlighting a particular instance of distance and solitude the young boy faced. Once the emotional force of this moment has been established, the narrator moves to deploy the memory of this distinct moment as the connective force to the image, writing that “the telescoped vision of small figures assembled in a detached space has remained with me for over forty years, and it reappears in the adjusted and transformed center of Jean’s 1983 picture” (48). The memory

of the young boy forced to remain outside the play has thus shifted – reappeared, adjusted, and transformed – but has nonetheless been captured and recalled through the image’s specificity.

Said’s next move in the essay is to reflect on the interpretive act he has just made by using a personal memory as the portal to larger cultural understanding. He writes: “My private past is inscribed on the surface of this peaceful but somehow brooding pastoral scene in the contemporary West Bank. I am not the only one surveying the scene” (48). The narrator continues to “survey the scene” by zooming in to the others involved in surveying this reality. He focuses his scrutiny on the gazes of the child within the picture and Mohr – the photographer outside the frame and behind the camera – wondering what each sees and how each perceives their situated reality. The people are not the only components in the photograph probed for their relationship and meaning; the narrator considers the steps, the terraces, the power grid, even the leaves:

The dense mass of leaves, right and left, lend their bulk to the frame, but they too impinge on the slender life they surround, like memory or a history too complex to be sorted out, bigger than its subject, richer than any consciousness one might have of it.
(48)

In each of these instances, we see how the narrator weighs the parts of the photo and their interaction through an analysis of the photograph’s composition in order to suggest possible interpretations. The rendering of memory in both image and prose serves as the primary, exploratory force of the essay which, as Said suggests, seeks to both make sense of the present and to hold on to bits of a disappeared past. Examples of memory as an interpretative lens range from formal readings of images which connect to memories or the difficulty in remembering (such as above), to the specificities of memory given in narrative:

Once I marked one [electric pole] with my initials EWS, hoping to find it again on the trip back. All of them looked exactly the same as we hurtled by. We never stopped. I never drove there again, nor can I now. Futile efforts to register my presence on the scene. (48)

In both of the above examples, the last sentence of the excerpt widens the lens to suggest the impossibility of freezing time via memory or history – such efforts are “futile,” they are “richer” and more “complex” than any single consciousness. Reflection and narrative achieved in both verbal and visual medium thus combine to enable the narrator to reach difficult and complex conclusions about the philosophical nature of the world and how he is able, in turn, to locate himself within it.

The power of the essays in *After the Last Sky* exists not only for Said – the author using composition as a way to create and maintain a place in this shifting world – but extends to the reader as well. In the final sentences of this first essay, “States,” the layered, polyphonic discourse negotiating memory, interpretation, speculation, and invitation shifts to the second person plural, uniting the narrator with the reader/viewer and bringing her into the realm of the photograph. The inclusion of the reader is reinforced by the invitation of “entering” the world Said and Mohr have presented; the concluding sentence reads: “Let us enter” (49). Suggesting that we make our way through the building’s “openings that suggest rich, cool interiors which outsiders cannot penetrate,” the narrator positions himself – and us, as readers – as insiders, capable of understanding and participation within the pleasures inside the interiors (the name, in fact, of the next essay in the collection). As the narrator himself points out, “intimate memory and contemporary social reality seem connected” by the elements within the photograph and through his own relation to that image (48). By reflecting on the narratives we hold most closely in dialogue with the images that fix and characterize our shared social reality, Said suggests that we can gain a kind of purchase on understanding richer than either singular mode might allow.

As I’ve demonstrated in the analysis above, the ways in which neither word nor image persists hierarchically over the other is crucial to understanding the accumulated relationship between the two and, indeed, to approaching multimodal texts from a productive position. In “States,” the prose consistently turns back on itself, sometimes after looking deeper into a photographic image, sometimes as the narrator attempts to sort out his own interpretative lenses and possible misunderstandings. Said uses the essay as a form of inquiry that pushes his thought further, but he also uses the images not only to

demonstrate his conclusions but to complicate them or provide another direction of thought or interpretation. In this way, attending to texts which make use of both word and image can suggest not only the rich possibilities of the hybrid essay, but also suggest or reimagine productive pedagogies for reading, writing, and generating increased cultural understanding. Said and Mohr's text is especially valuable, I argue, in the ways that it widens interpretation beyond a sense of uni-directional communication to a sense of shared inquiry, even among those who perceive themselves as unconnected to the population under consideration.

This is not to say that the complexities of understanding are fully mitigated by widening the scope of the essay beyond printed text. Said writes:

Perhaps I am only describing *my* inability to order things coherently, sequentially, logically, and perhaps the difficulties of resolution I have discerned in Halabi's book and in the old man with broken glasses are mine, not theirs. I write at a distance. I haven't experienced the ravages. If I had, possibly there would be no problem in finding a direct and simple narrative to tell the tale of history. (original emphasis, 130)

Said presents himself as a reader here, subject to the misperception and misreading that accompany first engagements and that are inherent in our own reading practices. The images in the text play an important role in terms of their ability to offer other interpretative alternatives – they put pressure on the narrator's conclusions and push him to rethink and re-imagine his ideas. Moreover, even as the narrator longs for the simplicity seemingly available via “direct” narratives, his prose belies even this as a reality through the inclusion of the hedging “possibly.” Although the narrative contemplates the possibility that experiencing the ravages of his native country firsthand would make narrating Palestinian stories easier, as readers we find this assertion not completely genuine.

Said has in fact complicated this version of being able to communicate the complexities of Palestinian lives earlier in the text, making it difficult to forget that he writes:

Our characteristic mode, then, is not a narrative, in which scenes take place *seriatim*, but rather broken narratives, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged

testimonials, in which the narrative voice keeps stumbling over itself, its obligations, and its limitations. (38)

Such a description more accurately resonates not only with the project of *After the Last Sky* but with the other hybrid essays explored in the previous chapters. The essay which gathers together fragments and pieces of narrative as its epistemological structure, the essay which cannot help but stumble over “its obligations, its limitations,” the essay which enacts a public intellectualism and connects its text to the worldliness of material reality – these are the essays of Anzaldúa and Said.

Like the work of Anzaldúa, the collaborative essays in *After the Last Sky* create a dialogized intellectual arena where ideas, ways of knowing and perceiving, and ways of representing these perspectives through discourse jostle one another to construct a rich landscape of possible interpretation. Using the flexible form of the essay to meditate, reflect, open up inquiry, and draw Palestinian experiences together, the multimodal composition extends each of these possibilities by including visual elements which both support and challenge the prose of the text. The collaboration of word and image in a relationship that allows each element to nonetheless retain its independence and equality results in multiple ways of addressing and summoning readers, a strategy which widens the possible audiences of the text and more directly asks readers to be part of the inquiry into Palestinian experience.

Two particular elements of *After the Last Sky* strengthen what I am calling the “summons” to the reader. The first is the text’s emphasis on dialogue – between citizens and nations, between competing versions of what it means to be Palestinian, between discourses both official and unofficial. It is perhaps no surprise that Said’s presentation of discourse in *After the Last Sky* seems Bakhtinian in nature. Part of what Said commends in the work of his privileged authors, particularly Conrad, is the worldliness of discourse: the writers he details often “valorize” speech, “making it the tentacle by which an otherwise silent text ties itself to the world of discourse” (45).¹¹ However, although Said is interested in the ways

¹¹ In the title essay to *The World, The Text, and the Critic*, Said cites two textual moments that echo Bakhtin’s views concerning the circulation, use, and re-use of discourse. In Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, Said draws attention to these words: “And besides, the last word is not said, - probably shall never be said. Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammering is of course our only and abiding intention?” And from Joyce’s *The*

that a text's multiple discourses sustain the text's worldliness, he is not naïve about the interactions between discourses, interactions which can sometimes be in bad faith or even be violent. As Said writes and as I demonstrated in the previous chapter concerning Anzaldúa: "words and texts are so much of the world that their effectiveness, in some cases even their use, are matters having to do with ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force" (48). Texts which expose such worldly actuality fulfill Said's call for critics to be responsible for "articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced" (53). The hybrid essay, in stressing and juxtaposing such voices and in providing the critic the most useful form to enact intellectual criticism, helps to forward this goal.

A second element instrumental in creating the interactive dialogue with the reader is the way that the text –through both its words and its images – addresses the reader. Said is straightforward about one purpose of the text: encouraging readers to question the stereotypes and static representations of Palestinians they might hold. Yet in presenting a range of other, more complex representations, and in sometime struggling to situate himself (as a doubly exiled figure) within these representations, Said opens up many possible entry points for readers to diversify their understanding of Palestine and its citizens. As the photos of Palestinians look back at us, as the prose intimately portrays Palestinian experiences and difficulties, as we are asked directly to confront the ways our understanding of this region is necessarily limited, the text both invites us in and holds us accountable.

This is the relationship and the productive tension inherent throughout the text as the reader moves between the multiple meanings of Said's words and Mohr's photographs, between past and present, between recollection and interpretation. The type of saturated meaning I have been describing is perhaps nowhere more evident than at the end of the text in the final pages of the book. The final gesture of the project is a page-large image of two children photographing Jean Mohr. One girl's face hidden behind the camera, her friend peers out playfully and inquisitively from behind her body. The caption reads: "Jerusalem, 1979. The photographer photographed." Again, the reader/viewer is confronted by

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, he turns to Dedalus' reflection that in interacting with the dean that "the language we are speaking is his before it is mine." For an extended discussion of Said's understanding of how discourse functions, see Chapter Five of *Beginnings*.

the impertinent gaze of a child summoning him or her into the photo, yet this time it seems, the invitation and response will be captured and preserved on film.

Mirroring and heightening the straightforward address of the girl's gaze is the powerful address of the text's final paragraph. Here the "I" of the narrator and Said seem most closely united, as the project of the book and its implications (and hopes for its readers) are laid out¹²:

I would like to think, though, that such a book not only tells the reader about us, but in some way also reads the reader. I would like to think that we are not just the people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers...we too are looking, we too are scrutinizing, assessing, judging. We are more than someone's object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us. If you cannot finally see this about us, we will not allow ourselves to believe that the failure has been entirely ours. Not any more. (166)

An important project of *After the Last Sky* has been to not only complicate and diversify the staid representations of Palestinians, but also to position Palestinians and the Palestinian gaze as participants in a dynamic, multi-dimensional relationship. That is to say, Palestinians are not, in Mohr's photos, as they often are in media representations, "just the people seen or looked at." This concluding paragraph drives home the message of Palestinian subjecthood. Suggestively, the penultimate sentence shifts to singular second person address, using the "you" to emphasize the necessity of this two-way dynamic. In a similar way to the children's gaze in the final image, the reader/viewer is not only called upon to participate in the project, but implicated and made responsible by the combination of the second person address. Moreover, the partial shift of responsibility onto the reader/viewer is strengthened by the final sentence in which the Palestinian "us" refuses to remain the only party responsible for the way Palestinians are perceived in singular and reified ways.

¹² For a reading of this distinction between authorial and narrative voices in Derridean terms, see Marrouchi's third chapter, "My Homeland, the Text" in *At the Limits*, where he elaborates the narrative versus narratorial voices that overlap one another and "haunt" the text, allowing disruption and preventing ultimate fixity or closure.

This is a message received loud and clear, a message which resonates powerfully, and a message which refuses to be ignored even upon a first reading/viewing of Said and Mohr's text. Students readily describe the interaction between word and image, between observer and observed and the way that these relationships are, in this instance, destabilized. For example, Christy Galletta, a student in a class I designed entitled *Words and Images* writes in response to the conclusion of Said's essay:

Said tells us that he and his people will no longer accept full responsibility for our misunderstanding...The photograph works as an illustrative supplement to this idea. What we see after reading the text is no longer a child with a camera, but a culture taking a stand, however timid. Mitchell discusses different relationships that are possible between text and image, and uses this text to exemplify them all. It is the work that the images and the text do in conjunction that makes it an effective photographic essay, and this is a good example of one way that a picture can speak for itself simply by sitting next to technically unrelated text. I say that the text is unrelated because nowhere do we read that Said took a picture of this little girl and she had a camera, etc. Instead we learn what we need to know by looking at the picture and reading the text, and then looking again at the picture for small ways (or large ways) that they interact or speak to each other...By allowing the photograph to do more than just illustrate the text (simply to add visual interest) and instead to clash with the text, agree with the text, or elaborate on the text, Said has brought a complexity to his work that Mitchell values. This way, Said has created "that most ambitious of books, a nation-making text" (Mitchell, 321).

Students in this class had read Mitchell's chapter on photographic essays but had not read Said and Mohr's text as a part of the class. When presented with the text and asked to respond, almost all students were quick to notice the complex ways the text and photographs interacted to create richer meaning than either would singly. Galletta, for example, notices the ways that the words and images are both "technically unrelated" and yet "speak to each other." She reads the photograph as illustrative of the ways the project allows Palestinian citizens – through Said and Mohr – to "take a stand." In ways similar to nearly all the students, Galletta is able to recognize the "nation-making" ability of *After the Last Sky*, by which Mitchell means not only the capacity for (re)creating a nation in the eyes of others, but the making of a nation for the citizens themselves.

As another student, Lisa Crawford, writes, the image illustrates the agency of the girls and, perhaps, of the Palestinian population in general as represented by Said and Mohr: “They have taken the next step towards fighting back – by “shooting” right back at us in a standoff of cameras.” Both students have homed in on a central idea of the prose – the shared failure of misrepresenting Palestine and its citizens and the shared responsibility of correcting that failure – and connected it to the way the photograph memorably captures the way these essays provide a way for Palestinians to “look back.” In such analyses, these students recognize the ironic nature of the image – the photographer being photographed, the reader now under the scrutiny of the gaze – and the way that this ironic distance has shifted the onus of responsibility to us, the readers. As a class, we questioned the extent to which students might enact such a critical and ironic distance with regard to their own writing and thinking in essays. And we discuss the ways that our texts could possibly prompt the types of powerful responses students identify in relationship to *After the Last Sky*.

In the final pages of the text, especially, students identify the combination of word and image to create a powerful reversal of sorts in which we, the readers and viewers, become the center of attention and all eyes are on us. All eyes wait now for our next move. In my classes, this next move (or a move that exists in tandem with reading) is the construction of photographic essays that take, as their impetus, the same intellectual goals I’ve charted via Edward Said: a mutually sustaining and provocative relationship between words and images, a critical and reflexive scrutiny, an attempt to connect writing with the worldliness outside the text. I challenge students to think of Said’s essay in terms of the way he shaped the genre to his own purposes, both rhetorical and representational; how might they think through their compositional choices in similar ways to produce a text with its own most appropriate structure, a hybrid text for which hybridity is a “necessity”?

I have investigated the above essays by Said to argue that, in some ways, this powerful combination of prose and photographs within the essay allows for this success. As our sense of a stable author/narrator – singular in purpose perhaps and able to pinpoint his or her audience – destabilize, the intellectual arena of the essay can serve as a valuable site for negotiating competing and diverse desires.

Able to convey the multiple positions authors occupy and draw upon in their writing, conducive to drawing together multiple inquiries within the space of a fairly short (and thus easily readable in our fast-paced society) space without falling prey to simplified sound-bite discourse, and directed at a range of conceivable audiences who possess different knowledges and are likely located across a range of disparate contexts, the hybrid, multi-modal essay enables not only communication, but discovery, dialogue, reflection, and critical scrutiny. Even as our senses of author, purpose, and audience change, the writing of such essays can help teach students how to summon their audiences to engage difficult issues and complex realities, while also teaching them ways to intellectually and ethically engage the diversity of our different experiences across the spaces of our increasingly technological and global world.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In a tribute to his long-time friend, W.J.T. Mitchell described the type of intellectualism Edward Said manifested in works such as *After the Last Sky* by writing about their long relationship:

We argued constantly -- over literary theory, new critical movements, postmodernism, deconstruction, politics, editorial decisions, and questions of taste. His characteristic strategy was to reduce me to silence, and then to turn the debate around and express some doubt about what he had been arguing, and to urge me to put up a better fight, like a boxer carrying his opponent for an extra round or two. This was, I feel, part of his larger critical strategy of cutting against the grain, questioning received ideas (including his own), and treating the critical encounter, not as a matter of "system" or "position," but of dialogic transformation. (B11)

In another of the many posthumous tributes to Said, a special version of *Social Text* describes Said as a public intellectual who insisted "on the need to cross discursive and institutional boundaries, to take up

the burden of rigorous theoretical and political challenges, to write from our own displaced positions with precision and clarity” (Deer, Prakash, and Shohat, 1). Given these commitments, it is no surprise that Said frequently and powerfully made use of the essay as the vehicle for progressive, anti-systematic thought, ethical exploration, and self-reflexive scrutiny. In the analysis I’ve provided above, we see these commitments: to dialogue and critique, to reflection and transformation, to “putting up a better fight” with each other and in the face of the larger world.

For Said, it was the essay’s “yearning for conceptuality and intellectuality” which offered the critic a way of beginning, a way of stitching thought to the worldliness so important to critiquing established knowledge and perhaps effecting change (52). Reinvigorating this “yearning for the conceptual and the intellectual” is increasingly important in our contemporary educational moment where, as Greg Dimitriadis notes, “knowledge itself has come to be treated like a perfectly transparent commodity” (376).¹³ Being able and willing to occupy the roles of amateur, of worldly intellectual, of a writer always beginning and re-beginning through forms of inquiry such as the essay provides one way to reach beyond commodified knowledge and discourse and reconnect thought with the cultural, political, and ethical contexts to which it belongs.

The commitment to resurrecting such “lost memories” was an integral part of Said’s vision of doing this work as a public intellectual. For Said, the public intellectual was a figure who maintained a certain independence from the pressures of institutions and states. This independence in turn provided the intellectual autonomy to recapture such memories as well as to be able to exert a critical force on the structures which sublimated such memories in the first place. Guided by fierce commitments to anti-systematic thought (like Adorno) and dialogue between multiple publics and their discourses (like Bakhtin), Said advocated a brand of secular criticism that sought to speak, as he put it, “truth to power.”

¹³ Dimitriadis’ article is one of several recent works which more directly investigate Said’s secular humanism and the projects of the public intellectual as they connect to humanist education. Dimitriadis’ work, “Edward Said and the Cultural Politics of Education,” and other useful articles in this vein are collected in a special publication of the journal *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. See also Jon Nixon’s article “Towards a Hermeneutics of Hope: The Legacy of Edward W. Said” in this same issue.

This chapter has extended the trajectory from essays which work through hybridity solely in words (such as Anzaldúa), to those essays which combine visual elements with hybrid prose writing, such as Said and Mohr's *After the Last Sky*. Through my analysis of *After the Last Sky*'s interactive epistemology, this chapter has presented a case for reading multimodal essays to increase ethical, cultural inquiry and rich literacy practices that negotiate words, images, and multiple ways of understanding. The questions I have introduced here regarding multimodal composition are considered more fully in the next chapter. If, as I've argued, Anzaldúa's essays encourage multiple literacies and Said's essays encourage multiple modes, I argue that cinematic representations which take the essay as their epistemological model encourage multiple rhetorics, particularly visual rhetorics. In this way, my final chapter continues to explore and test the claims of current theorists who advocate the production of such compositions within the university.

Accordingly, the final chapter considers compositions which exist solely within the visual realm: essay-films. Building on the theories of the image I've established here, I consider the essayistic style at work in the films of contemporary Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-Wai as one way to engage and test the claims made by proponents of visual rhetorics and multimodal writing classrooms. A "worldly" filmmaker in Said's sense of the term, Wong Kar-Wai's films also recover and scrutinize the "lost memories" of Hong Kong – a country in flux politically and culturally. Chapter five thus poses questions which extend the arguments presented thus far into the realm of the visual – a space which, as writers and teachers of composition, might feel as both distant from our practices and values and yet ever-present in our contemporary world. How might cinematic essays usefully enlarge our sense of composition, our practices and pedagogies for the creation and crafting of textual form, and the work of the essay as an intellectual activity? As our students move between their experiences and the larger outside world, as they oscillate between private and public discourses in order to interpret what they see and what they know, how can such hybrid forms *inform* their texts and *enrich* their methodologies? As composition teachers who find ourselves in an increasingly multimodal world, must we necessarily broaden our scope beyond words on the page?

5.0 SENSITIZING COMPOSITION: ESSAYISTIC MOVEMENT, AESTHETIC HYBRIDITY, AND STYLE AS PRAXIS IN TWO ESSAY FILMS

A part of something is for the foreseeable future going to be better than all of it. Fragments over wholes. Restless nomadic activity over the settlements of held territory. Criticism over resignation... Attention, alertness, focus. To do as others do, but somehow to stand apart. To tell your story in pieces, *as it is*.
- Edward Said, *After the Last Sky*

To compose is not always synonymous with ordering-so-as-to persuade, and to give the filmed document another sense, another meaning, is not necessarily to distort it. If life's paradoxes and complexities are not to be suppressed, the question of degrees and nuances is incessantly crucial. Meaning can therefore be political only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized and, when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but rather, empties it, or decentralizes it....For, when not equated with mere techniques of beautifying, aesthetics allows one to experience life differently or, as some would say, to give it "another sense," remaining in tune with its drifts and shifts. (41)
- Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *The Totalizing Quest of Meaning*

Recently the field of composition and rhetoric has seen a burgeoning interest in the visual. From conferences, compilations, and journals focused on visual technology and visual rhetorics, to calls for multi-modal and digital composition, the field has expanded its reach from the page to the multiple screens that shape our lives. What new pressures does an expanding visual, sensory, and technological world place on the writing classroom, the writing teacher, and writing students? Should we be drawing more actively on the forms of writing students engage daily: IMs, emails, text messages, webpages, blogs, and increasingly designed visual texts? Should we be teaching students to present their ideas and their writing across multiple forms and modes: on the Internet, in Powerpoint presentations, in YouTube videos, in more public arenas now readily available via our networked society? How will our writing

classrooms and our teaching practices change? And what role will prose-based writing continue to play in this landscape? What role can the essay play?

Although the previous chapters have been discussing aesthetic hybridity and the essay's special sensitivity to language, discourse, thought and its own construction and presentation, this chapter turns more specifically to the aesthetics of the visual. My argument for the writing and reading of hybrid and multimodal essays in the previous four chapters has begun to address the questions I've posed above. As I suggested in the previous chapter, the addition of images to hybrid essays foregrounds the limits and possibilities for multiple forms of representation and allows students to therefore negotiate these differences in the construction of their own essays. This chapter extends these claims in order to advocate for students constructing short essay films as part of a repertoire of thoughtful and reflective compositional practices.

I recommend this particular practice through an evaluation of what essay films offer that might supplement the work already done in composition classes. Below, I trace the evolution of the concept of an "essay film" and I provide a brief history of contemporary scholarship produced in relationship to new media. I follow these summaries with an analysis of two contemporary and suggestive examples of essay films. This analysis attends to calls for multimodal composition by confronting specific examples of successful visual texts that use the essay as a way to explore a particular intellectual inquiry. This chapter also hopes to make clear how increasing interest and scholarship on the visual and the bevy of approaches and commitments that are currently arising provide, if nothing else, the opportunity to reassess what it is we value, hope for, and aspire to encourage as writing teachers. As I've articulated in previous chapters, I have turned to the essay in order to encourage the creation of an intellectual arena of thought and collaboration between teachers and students manifested through writing and discussion. Such an arena is based in complex inquiry, critical and skeptical thought, reflexivity and the exchange of ideas.

One way these values can be in productive dialogue with the increasingly visual world is through a medium now termed the "essay film." The growing interest in film and writing communities alike in this form of the essay pressures understandings of the essay and suggests that we consider expanding

beyond the literary and philosophical print-based essays with which many in English departments are most familiar. Below I briefly chart the history of the concept and term “essay film” as well as the context within composition scholarship for multimedia composition practices. I then turn to two examples of essay films: one by the most widely acknowledged essay filmmaker, Chris Marker, and another by the emerging essay filmmaker Wong Kar-wai. In each section I consider how these essay films function *as essays* as I have defined them throughout the dissertation and I delineate what makes these films essayistic models for students composing visual essays of their own.

5.1 WHAT IS AN ESSAY FILM?

Although the history of cinema has been punctuated by suggestions of an essayistic film, little scholarship on what an essay film might look like was generated until fairly recently. Leading many of the inquiries into the essay film over the past several years have been film scholar Timothy Corrigan and essay scholar Philip Lopate, both of whom have been exploring how the essay can help us understand films, film production, and film aesthetics.¹ The work of these two scholars has spawned increasing interest in describing essay films and articulating why such visual compositions are, in fact, essayistic.

Lopate in particular offers a carefully delineated exploration of the essay film in his article, “In Search of the Centaur: The Essay film.” Although he also points out that essay films have been made over several decades by directors from Jean-Luc Godard to Woody Allen, Lopate’s intervention attempts

¹ Although Timothy Corrigan’s work has been pursuing these inquiries for some time, particularly through presentations, there is little published scholarship yet to this effect. It is my understanding that he is currently compiling his work on the essay film into a full-length volume tentatively titled “Visible Thinking: The Essay film from Chris Marker to Derek Jarman.” In the meantime, for a sense of Corrigan’s work, his frequently taught handbooks *Writing about Film* and *A Short Guide to Writing About Film* provides a starting place. It was my pleasure to attend a compelling panel at the 2006 Society for Cinema and Media Conference moderated by Corrigan, in which panelists presented essayistic videos they had, themselves, constructed, reflecting on the composition practices of making such essay films.

to delineate several requirements of what he perceives as a newly defined cinematic genre.² By Lopate's account, the film must have words in the form of spoken or titled text; the film must represent a single voice, a personal point of view, and an attempt to work out a "reasoned line of discourse or problem"; and lastly, the language of the film's text must necessarily be "as eloquent, well-written and interesting as possible" (246-7). Lopate explores several essay films in depth – including, among others, *Ici et Ailleurs* by Godard, *Filming Othello* by Orson Welles, and *Roger and Me* by Michael Moore – in order to argue that these films do not quite satisfy the criteria he has established. Eventually Lopate turns to the filmmaker Chris Marker (whom I will turn to later in this chapter) as his primary example of an essayistic filmmaker.

By my account, Lopate is most useful not in the creation of the criteria listed above, but instead in the language he develops to talk about what is difficult to pinpoint and categorize. His description of the essay film as "tracking a person's thoughts as he or she tries to work out some mental knot, however various its strands," stands as both a useful metaphor and image for what the essay film tries to accomplish. In the end, however, Lopate errs on the side of over-delineation and, thus, over-simplification. As my students and I came to conclude after testing his definitions in a class entitled *Seminar in Composition: The Essay Film*, Lopate's schematized readings led to a propensity for a singular voice that controls the material, as well as a hyper-privileging of direct, graspable, "rational" argument (Lopate eschews less linear explorations as mere collage.) Although useful as a starting point, Lopate's demarcations ignore the intricacies and particularities present in each of the films I will examine below, and by their too reified categorization significantly narrow what we might understand an essay film to be or to do.

A more recent publication by film theorist Nora Alter picks up where Lopate's earlier article left off. In similar fashion, Alter argues that essay films have existed since the 1920's but that theories of the essay film have only recently become more fully articulated; however, her 2007 article "Translating the

² The flip side of Lopate's somewhat dehistoricized perception of the term is Chris Marker scholar Catherine Lupton's decontextualized use of the term which presumes the term "essay film" to be fully legible and free from dispute. Clearly the term resides somewhere between these two understandings.

Essay into Film and Installation” does more than other articles to fill in the history of the term’s use. Alter structures a similar lineage for the essay film as the first chapter of this dissertation offered for the intellectual essay: she turns to Lukács, Adorno, and Walter Benjamin as key figures for both the articulation of prose-based essay characteristics as well as important figures for film theory. This parallel prompts her description of the essay film as a genre which, much like the written essay, “poaches across disciplinary borders, often transgressing conceptual and formal norms” (44). Alter argues that the essay film has increasingly begun to supplant the function of the prose film-theory essay and that, moreover, the essay film has begun to move from its audio-visual first stage into a second, three-dimensional stage of installation. Since Alter is a scholar of Chris Marker’s work this argument makes sense: for all scholars of the essay film, Marker is the epitome of a film essayist who has illustrated the trajectory from cinematic-photographic essay (*La Jetée*) to essay film (*Sans Soleil*) to the increasingly interactive installation essays and CD-ROM hypermedia essays (*OWLS AT NOON Prelude: The Hollow Men* and *Immemory*, respectively.)

Alter’s contribution is particularly useful in filling in early uses of the term and the historical connections between filmmakers who practiced in the genre of essay films. She identifies the precursors of the modern day essay film in the work of Dziga Vertov (*Man with a Movie Camera*) and German filmmaker and theorist Hans Richter; she then offers two lines of thought which influenced the development of the essay film. The first line of thought begins with Richter, whose 1940 essay “The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film” argued that the essay’s complexity and commitment to exploring problems and concepts could offer a new genre which surpassed the capabilities of documentary film at the time. After his emigration to New York’s City College Institute of Film Technique during World War II, Richter was able to extend this project through his interaction with the next generation of filmmakers, including Stan Brackhage, Maya Deren, and Andy Warhol, among others. A second line of praxis which advanced the essay film emerged from the French filmmaker Alexandre Astruc who, in 1948, coined the term “camera stylo,” a type of filmed philosophy which inscribed “essays” via the image. Although Alter’s focus is on the New German cinema filmmakers influenced by

this French thread (Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, and Harun Farocki, for example), it is easy to see the parallel movement in the French New Wave, particularly in filmmakers such as John-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, and of course, Chris Marker (who trained with Resnais early on in his career.)

Compared to Lopate's more schematic definition, Alter's historical, contextual, and theoretical take on the essay film provides the richest description of the genre thus far. Alter writes that essential to the meaning of the essay film is that fact that:

The medium itself can never offer more than re-presentation, and that the veracity demanded by the documentary genre is ultimately unattainable. The essay film, because it plays with fact and fiction, untruths as much as truths, poses problems without answers, and is deeply self-reflexive. As such, it is seen as the ideal genre by filmmakers who want to advance historical knowledge but recognize that this can only be done in a tenuous way. (54)

Since Alter is interested in "advancing historical knowledge" her study focuses on the crisis of the changing world order of the 1980's and 1990's –including the fall of the Berlin Wall and of what she refers to as Second World communism – in conjunction with the changing visual order and the shift from analogue to digital media forms. Alter rightly notes that the focus of essay films emerging from this time period forward is on representation, memory, history, and "technological reproduction and vision" (55). Although Alter overstates the case a bit in arguing that "claims to fact-telling truth disappeared altogether" during this period, I do agree that the essay film capitalized on and extended critiques of objective truth that had long supported documentary film. In this way, essay films continue the critical and worldly function of the essay I discussed in the previous chapter.

Alter's work thus does much to historicize and delineate a theory of the essay film. However, whereas Alter relies on Benjamin's notion of "translatability" as the way that the essay's fragmentary and incomplete nature supports its mutation into other forms and media, it is my contention that the essay's existence as an intellectual arena – an impetus and not merely a product – also allows such a translation. The lineage I rely on via Adorno and Bakhtin and in conversation with the sites of essayism I've

considered throughout this project offers a similarly contextualized and intellectually rigorous backdrop for understanding the essay without relying on the somewhat sticky issue of translation between media. This chapter extends the trajectory of my earlier arguments in that I argue that filmmakers turn to the essay film as a powerful and effective way to make thought and the interaction of ideas visible on the screen. Here, the visual aesthetics of cinema (including the aural elements of the soundtrack) contribute an additional epistemology to the essay, an epistemology which, although in dialogue with the general epistemologies the essay offers, bears increased scrutiny.

5.2 WIDENING THE FIELD: COMPOSITION BEYOND THE PAGE?

Within the field of composition and rhetoric, the impact of technological development has been considered for over a decade, and recently the visual rhetorics and multimedia composing practices that would inform theories of the essay film, for example, have constituted a significant area of research. Earlier debates along these lines outlined both fears and excitement for the uses of technology in the classroom as well as across broader publics. Lauded as the ultimate democratizing tool and critiqued as the next stultifying reality of late capitalist society, responses to technology's new literacies were initially perceived as both encroachments and avenues of possibility. Yet as Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe, among others, noted early on in debates concerning composition and technology, it is not the use of technology, itself, which are problematic, but the "uncritical enthusiasm" for such practices which can obscure possible problems and challenges of the intersections of technology and writing instruction. My discussion in this chapter does not aim to occupy the space of such unfettered enthusiasm, one of two major rhetorics that Tim Mayers and Kevin Swafford have identified as driving the conversation about technology and pedagogy (the other rhetoric being that of critique without proposed solution). Instead, my argument throughout this project – and via this chapter's particular examples – is that more scrutiny and engagement with even familiar multimedia texts such as hybrid essays (across their many forms and

media) is crucial to understanding both the theoretical and pedagogical possibilities and limits these texts offer students.

This intervention is necessary, to my mind, as one precise way to heed Selfe's call to "pay attention" to technology, media, and changing literacy practices in order to think hard about both opportunities and broader implications. Now that scholarship in our field has shifted from what Selfe termed the "notable" (as in rare) occasions when compositionists considered technology to what Randy Bass has more recently called the problem of "overrepresentation," new pressures on the field have emerged. Bass' concept of "overrepresentation" points this out; he argues that our contemporary conversations now proliferate the many (too many) opportunities, sites, texts, and practices that technology affords.³ Careful choices must now be made about specific uses and purposes for the diverse texts and pedagogies in our classrooms.

I have suggested in these last two chapters that bridging the gap between print and digital technologies are technologies of the image (both still and moving.) These visual technologies also warrant careful investigation and can help us, in turn, pay attention to the more fleeting and dispersed phenomenon that happen in cyberspace. The hybrid essay, in the various incarnations I've considered here, provides a grounded place to consider the theoretical and pedagogical interactions between discourses, languages, images, and multiple epistemologies. Call it a way of freezing our attention: within our familiar codex books (or with a quick rewind of a film) we can nonetheless witness and assess the changes that hybridity brings. Filling in these gaps across a range of media and technology therefore contributes to a richer and more accurate critical technological literacy. Moreover, attending to these hybrid texts can also help us to build a critical visual vocabulary that better describes the ways that texts and visuals can blend almost imperceptibly in ways that are not only postmodern, as Mary Hocks notes ("Understanding Visual Rhetoric, 630), but as Anne Wysocki and others have argued, also layered, complex, and demanding careful analysis ("Impossibly Distinct", 210).

³ As an example of a productively focused opportunity to reap the benefits of technology, Bass refers to Anzaldúa's texts and argues that she represents one site of "culturally critical and meta-critical" discourse which could be productively explored further with the help of digital tools.

For composition, the question is this: how do we assist students in confronting and constructing not only such analyses, but texts of their own that also act in complex and engaged ways? Johndan Johnson-Eilola has argued that one way to make such a shift is to widen our understanding of what constitutes a text, thus moving from thinking of composition as mainly production (as in the production of a unified piece of writing) to also consider composition as “connection” (“Negative Spaces,” 24). Such a practice would encourage students to produce texts that, in some ways, resemble the hybrid essays I’ve advocated here. One focus would be on students connecting their own ideas with the texts and contexts of others and re-presenting such information for particular audiences. Although Johnson-Eilola’s example is grounded in hypertext, it is not hard to see the hybrid essays I’ve documented above as being in conversation with such projects.⁴ And his notion of composition beyond a composed product dovetails with my advocacy of the essay as not only a product but as an epistemological impetus.

Stuart Selber has also argued for broadening our relationship to both texts and to literacies. In *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, Selber contends that students must be able to navigate and negotiate a range of literacies – functional, critical, and rhetorical – in order to allow them to conceptualize and use technology not only as a way to get a job, but also as a site which enables both critique and reflexive praxis (25). Extending the repertoire of literacies in this way also allows students a wider range of subject positions in relationship to technological environments: students are not only “users” of technology, but “questioners” and “producers” as well (25). Given the traits of the essay I have emphasized throughout this dissertation, multimedia texts offer rich opportunities to practice rhetorical, generic, stylistic (and increasingly design-oriented) awareness.

Lester Faigley makes a similar point in his essay “The Challenge of the Multimedia Essay,” where he argues that given the hybrid history of early printed books which contained decoration, illumination, or hand-colored illustration that it is not much of a stretch to image “visual ideas in addition

⁴ Hypertext scholarship provided an early site for considering the intersections of technology, composition, and pedagogy and due to its emergence in the late 1980s thus contains the most overt ties to postmodernist theory. For more on hypertext and postmodernism two collections are particularly useful: George Landow’s *Hyper/Text/Theory* and Ilana Snyder’s *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*. For more on hypertext’s connections to composition, see Richard Parent’s dissertation, *The Digital Affect*.

to verbal ones in essays” (187). Multimedia essays have been and are here to stay, it seems, and Faigley puts the case strongly in arguing that students will be asked more and more frequently to use multimedia forms. “I can think of no scenario for the revival of public discourse that does not involve digital media,” he writes (179). The important thing we must remember, however, is the rhetorical knowledge in composing such essays – it is not enough (and in fact it is detrimental, instrumental, and against our widely-held values) to “simply teach students to do what the tools allow” (181). Faigley’s insistence on teaching the critical and rhetorical literacies attendant to multimedia forms, particularly those which make substantial use of technology, reflects widely held contemporary views of composition’s important role in our contemporary world.

Before I outline a similar argument below via the consideration of the under-theorized essay film, however, it might be helpful to pause and establish some useful definitions of the various terms in circulation, namely *multimodal*, *multimedia*, and *new media*, and their attendant literacies. Each of these terms emphasizes not only the technologies we increasingly use, but the literacies we use to understand and respond to diverse environments. A literacies-oriented approach is important for compositionists and students in order to perceive multimedia, visual, and digital texts not just as “technologies” independent of other systems of learning, design, and interaction, but as what Selber has called “literacy environments” (“Reimagining the Functional” 471). The definitions below try to identify the components of hybrid, complex texts as well as recognize what these complexities mean for reading and writing in response.

For example, Gunther Kress and Carey Jewitt, forerunners of multimodal studies and multimodal literacy advocacy, define what they mean by multimodal in the Introduction to their collection entitled *Multimodal Literacy*:

A multimodal approach to learning requires us to take seriously and attend to the whole range of modes involved in representation and communication. Throughout the chapters in this book, *mode* is used to refer to a regularized organized set of resources for meaning-making, including, image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound-effect. Modes are broadly understood to the effect of the work of culture in shaping

material into resources for representation. These resources display regularities due to that cultural work...these regularities are what have been called “grammars” traditionally....[I]n communication, modes rarely, if ever, occur alone. (1-2)

Working from this definition, Chapter Four was based on the multimodalities created between word and image and the literacy practices that pertained to engaging such interactions in photographic essays.

Since this chapter extends beyond the still image to the moving image, my language to describe both texts and interpretive practices shifts to multimedia in order to foreground the ways that a change in media both allows and demands a different set of responses. Although Kress’ definition might still be made to apply, my shift to media instead of mode emphasizes the technology (cinema) that distributes these “resources of representation.” And, this semantic shift thus also acknowledges two of the key discourses that composition has adopted in advocating for diverse production of texts and literacies: multimodal *and* multimedia.⁵

A third productive lens is provided by the term *new media*, a term which those in film and media studies typically use. This term has also been picked up in rhetoric and composition studies. For example, in their article “Under the Radar of Composition Programs,” DeVoss et al argue that being too tightly bound to singular (perhaps official) notions of literacy perpetuates inequity and elides the complex and situated nature of literacies. They define *new media literacy* in this way:

We use *new-media literacy* broadly as well to refer to the reading-viewing interacting and the composing-designing efforts that occur primarily in digital environments as well as to the cultural values and understandings associated with these efforts. New-media texts are often composed in multiple media (e.g., film, video, audio, computer, among others)....These texts often place a heavy emphasis on visual elements (both still photography and moving photography, images, graphics, drawings, renderings, and animations) and sound...Although such texts often include some alphabetic features, they

⁵ To some extent, this difference in language is geographically and contextually related. Given their emphasis in Education and attention to primary education, Kress and the New London Group tend to prefer the term mode, whereas most composition scholars working in the U.S. tend to prefer “media” as the key descriptive term.

also typically resist containment by alphabetic systems, demanding the multiple literacies of seeing, listening, and manipulating as well as those of reading and writing. (172)

Clearly there is much overlap among these terms although they accent slightly different features. Such definitional work is crucial as we continue to shape our relationship to evolving technology and media opportunities. Although my project only takes up the first two of the visual elements listed above – still photography and moving (cinematic) photography – scrutiny of each of these media is necessary and needed. I will leave it to others to fill in other areas of new media literacy, their implications, and possibilities.⁶

My work below offers a more narrow intervention among the vast spaces of new media DeVoss et al articulate above. Focusing on the essay film allows me to suggest connections between my work and what electronic media theorist Gregory Ulmer calls “electracy,” essentially the literacies that pertain to digital media which necessitates new epistemologies and affective practices native to the apparatus of electronic media.⁷ The evaluations of essay films below extend the literacy acts surrounding hybrid essays that I’ve described in earlier chapters to a new apparatus – the cinema – and consider the “new types of literacy and affective practices” contingent to this media. Combining scholarship in film theory, composition theory, and literacy studies, I more fully elucidate the essay film’s reliance on the essayistic impetus I’ve defined in earlier chapters (an epistemological drive toward critical and reflexive knowledge via thinking in and through compositional practices), and I argue for the composition of essays across media as one part of a student’s composition repertoire.

Below I consider Chris Marker’s 1983 film *Sans Soleil* and Wong Kar-Wai’s 2001 film *In the Mood for Love*. The first a documentary- travelogue collage, and the second a seemingly narrative film that nonetheless serves a complex cultural function, each film makes use of the essay in order to transcend

⁶ Although DeVoss, Johansen, Selfe, and Williams hyphenate the term new-media, my usage of the non-hyphenated term reflects the most common usage within film and media studies in order to reflect this chapter’s emphasis.

⁷ Others involved in work of this type include Eric Faden of Bucknell University, Mike Wesch of Kansas State, Richard Miller of Rutgers, and the authors of such websites as Chicago Media Works and the new EssayFilm.Net. Some of these works take advantage of the Creative Commons software and website to both copyright and share their work with others; most post on high visibility sites such as YouTube.

both generic boundaries and literal simplifications. Spanning over twenty years, these films provide valuable contours for understanding why and how these films make use of the essay and what they can teach us about the essay across media. Given my focus on complexly essayistic and aesthetic texts that focus on ethical representation, I leave it to others to further expand our understanding of the essay film via more typical documentary essays (such as Ken Burns' recent works.)

The explanation I offer below considers three overlapping questions not usually considered in the limited scholarship on the genre. First, I explore how considering these films as essays pinpoints a range of essayistic structures and movements. How do these films pursue their questions and projects with the help of the essay? It is essential to note that I look at these films not mainly as instances useful for educating students in how to negotiate visual texts (although I frequently also teach essay films in Film courses); instead, I consider these essay films in order to pay attention to what they tell us about composition, its processes, interpretation, and situated inquiry. I argue that each essay film has something to tell us about complex argumentation, the aesthetic as a way of understanding that operates outside logocentric boundaries, and the role each of these features plays in successful compositions.

Accordingly, I also suggest the range of aesthetic practices that mark the style of each essay film. Articulating the texture, quality, and presence of the films' styles provides a sense of the languages useful for making discussions of style part of our interpretive acts. Here I hope to suggest how the descriptive tools of other disciplines might complement our own descriptive repertoires. I argue, moreover, that focusing on the style of these films is essential for understanding how each film deals with issues of representation. Since this is a central concern of each film, studying how they succeed in representing identity and subjectivity in situated, complex ways is not only crucial to understanding these texts, but also suggestive in terms of how we might encourage students to reflect on their representations in similar fashion.

Lastly, I move to combine my summations of essayistic movement, hybrid aesthetics, and ethical representation in a theory of advanced composition practices. Assessing movement, style, and representation, I compare the ways that each film is governed by a central epistemology. Whether

functioning via juxtaposition as in *Sans Soleil* or through displacement as in *In the Mood for Love*, each film gives us richer ways to describe how advanced essays work and how they can be successfully suggestive without being overly literal. These essay films allow nuance and complexity to emerge through subtle movements instead of through overdrawn techniques. And, these epistemologies draw the reader into a more interesting and productive relationship through ideas and meanings which are less stable, less reified, and more open to interactive interpretation. In this way, confronting the essay as it works in the cinematic medium allows us to move back to the page and the written word with different perspectives, ambitions, and strategies to engage with our students. The discussion of each film and the final coda provides ways to understand these films precisely *as* essays grounded in hybrid aesthetics and therefore suggests how a range of compositional activities, including multimedia composition, might be productively brought into our classrooms.

5.3 JUXTAPOSING REFLEXIVITIES: THE ESSAY FILMS OF CHRIS MARKER

How might film allow us to test the potential of a cinematic form to fulfill the promise of the essay as an intellectual, reflexively driven activity? Given Chris Marker's status as one of the primary practitioners of the essay film, this chapter situates Chris Marker's most essayistic film – *Sans Soleil* – as an exemplar of the genre and seizes the occasion to circle back to the first chapter and the ways Adorno's theorization of the essay may now be tested on the essay film. This section argues that *Sans Soleil* especially aspires to Trinh T. Minh-Ha's description of a work that does not approach its stories through some kind of objectivist realism – a method which purports to be able to know and fix what things “truly are” – but instead works to acknowledge that the story is, as her epigraph notes, in pieces. The epistemology of Marker's essay film emphasizes such juxtapositions, multiple ways of knowing, and reflexivity. The themes of the film parallel this epistemological investigation and center on the functions of memory, especially as they pertain to history and the functions of time.

Marker, although established as one of most important and innovative filmmakers from the period of the French New Wave, remains an elusive, even contradictory, director who evades nearly all critics' attempts to pin him down. Due to this resistance, the body of scholarship concerning Marker is not as full as many would expect for a filmmaker working steadily for fifty years. This section on Marker draws on some of the available scholarship (including a recent and important 2006 monograph) but also extends the discussion by offering more substantial attention to the way that all Marker's critics characterize his work: essayistic. This section thus also attempts moments of essayistic description in my own prose in order to provide a texture and sense of *Sans Soleil*.⁸

But first, the memories. In recollections of *Sans Soleil*, viewers of the film might remember images of a cat, an emu, or a giraffe shot at close range. We might remember images of Tokyo, Iceland, or Guinea-Bissau; still footage of the film *Vertigo*, documentation of what the narrator calls "neighborhood celebrations," or the ritual ceremony for burning broken dolls. We might remember the images of Japanese television in which the eyes on the screen look back at us; we might remember the eyes of a Cape Verdean woman glancing up at the camera for 1/24th of a second, the length, the narrator notes, of a film frame. Certainly we remember the ways that all these images, and more, are passed through "the zone" – a machine which distorts images in order to present them *as* images – images shaped and changed by history, memory, perception. We remember, in *Sans Soleil* in particular, the way that the image is interrogated for what it can and cannot show, what it can and cannot remember, what it can and cannot represent. Whether frozen in time, pulsating in and out of focus, or suspended and scanned with lines of light, these images permeate each other – moving in and out of history, memory, and dreamscape – interrupting and erupting, persisting and altering.

The soundtrack that accompanies the images emerges and recedes, sometime diegetically, sometimes generated and synthesized. And tying together these images and sounds – while at the same time questioning them, pulling them apart – are a series of letters, a type of travelogue of things seen,

⁸ For two other interesting, web-based, essayistic interpretations of the film see http://www.geocities.com/wolfgang_ball/ and http://www.canonmagazine.org/fall2003/wolfson_seehim.htm.

examined, recalled. Written by a fictional man and read by an unseen woman, they explore what the narrator calls “the coexistence of different concepts of time.” Time itself and memory’s engagement with time is reconstructed, rewritten as it were, so that it might be not only “repaired,” as the narrator desires, but also more closely examined. The movement of this film offers a metaphor for itself gleaned from *Vertigo* – the shape of the spiral – a continual circling back, a cycling between past and future. The genre which makes this movement possible – which allows word and image to interpenetrate and energize one another, while positing reflexivity as the primary way that knowledge is both formed and questioned – is the essay. We may call Marker’s *Sans Soleil*, as others have, an essay film.

In calling *Sans Soleil* an essay film, then, to what extent can this cinematic representation exemplify the essay and its intellectual possibility? As Marker cycles between past and future, allowing each to help understand (and even reshape) one another, how can circling back to the beginning of this project allow us to gain purchase on a new medium which has also sought the assistance of the essay to do its work? Returning to several key theorizations I outlined in the first chapter can help to descriptively fill in the contours of this essay film both generically and formally.

First, remembering Adorno’s valuation of the essay as a form which mediates the forces of culture provides ready connection to Marker’s essayistic explorations. Ranging across Cape Verde to Guinea-Bissau, from Tokyo to Iceland to the Ile de France, *Sans Soleil* actively assembles cultural moments, images, and rituals and holds them side by side. Allowing viewers to notice overlaps, differences, and thematic similarities, the essay film enacts fluctuating atmospheres of alert observation, spontaneous meandering, and pensive speculation. As I argued in Chapter One the essay is not a tool to further mediate and mystify culture as natural; instead, Adorno reminds that the “essay’s impulse...is the exact opposite of the theological; it is critical: through confrontation of texts with their own emphatic concept, with the truth that each text intends even in spite of itself, to shatter the claim of culture and move it to remember its untruth” (Adorno, 167-8). As an example of this tendency, *Sans Soleil* critiques one general’s rise to power in Cape Verde followed by his assassination by his own party. Since Marker

emphasizes the way this event has been actively, purposefully, and ideologically misrepresented, this confrontation highlights demystification as a particular project of this essay film. The narrator writes,

That's how history advances, plugging its memory as one plugs one's ears.... I'm writing you all this from another world, a world of appearances. In a way the two worlds communicate with each other. Memory is to one what history is to the other: an impossibility.⁹

Sans Soleil's ability to put pressure on history as it is misremembered and its ability to stitch global histories to one another while still stressing particular contexts illustrates the critical impetus of the essay. The desire to pressure history and its elisions is a trait persistent across Marker's oeuvre.¹⁰

Second, in addition to demystifying culture and method, the essay necessarily probes the functionality of both empiricism and rationalism as traditional ways of knowing. The essay is able to question staid epistemologies particularly through remaining skeptical in its tone and in its conclusions, as well as through "accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total" (Adorno, 157). Valuing local contexts and realities is crucial for Marker across his work, especially in that a focus on material specificity in turn allows acknowledgment of the world as mediated reality. Just as the film's letters (written by a fictional stand-in for Marker) often act tentatively, contextually, and partially, the essay resides in the partial and contextual rather than a totalizing linearity. The medium itself further presses this connection by emphasizing the transitory and ephemeral nature of the image and the shifting grounds of representation. The film's focus on a single glance, a repeated image, and artifacts or rituals that have disappeared or are on the verge of extinction highlights representation's mediated quality. Yet even as it embraces the transitory, the essay seeks to ground its exploration via the temporality of history as it is played out.

⁹ Quotations from the film *Sans Soleil* are from the transposed text available at: http://www.markertext.com/sans_soleil.htm.

¹⁰ See Alter's chapter "The Wolves: Political Filmmaking" which conveniently groups Marker's political and activist films thematically together.

Third, the essay's method demonstrates these commitments to demystification and multiple knowledge abilities. Skeptical in nature, the essay film questions ideas of truth, particularly via its oscillating movement between these histories and particularities. As established at the beginning of this project, the essay treats "what is normally held to be derived, without however pursuing its ultimate derivation" (Adorno, 159). The anti-systematic approach of the essay is clearly visible in *Sans Soleil* where, at times, we feel adrift in the personal thoughts, memories, and speculations of the narrator. Although connections are forged between images throughout the film, these connections act as constellations instead of linear derivations. The essay film, as it sorts through its images from its travels, feels "immediate" and "direct" as Adorno suggests, since it fashions its own epistemological method. Moreover, since the essay resists binary categorizations, especially the binary relationship of subject to object, the essay film's words and images are both mediated and dialogically interactive. The juxtaposition of multiple discourses and images sustains the heteroglossia of the film and allows the "collision between differing points of views on the world" in a dialogical conversation (Bakhtin, 360). The result in Marker's film is a meditation on both the images the film introduces and the way the letter-writing narrator tries to process and think through his encounter with these images. Epistemologically speaking, André Bazin's description of Marker's work as a "form of intelligence" is suggestive and readily connects with Adorno's description of the essay as an "arena of intellectual experience" (Bazin cited in Alter, 19). It is the structure and movement of the essay which allows it to mediate the intellectual experience "through its own conceptual organization" (160-1).

Lastly, the reflexive trait of the essay I have outlined throughout the dissertation is central to this constant mediation between what the essay's exploration seeks to know and how it seeks to know. This level of reflexivity is built into both the structure and impetus of the essay film. As Alter suggests, Marker's film "self-reflexively offers its own film criticism, supplying a theoretical flavor to its narrative" (19). From the opening moments of the film in which a key image of three Icelandic children is preceded by a length of black film leader, the material nature of the cinema is made visible and positioned as something the film, itself, must consider. Consistently foregrounding how the essay film goes about its

work – pointing out why the narrator notices what he does, why the image exists as it does, and the multiple entry points available to both narrator and audience – the reflexive structure of the essay film allows the viewer to interpretatively engage and deepen the conceits the essay film offers. In Bakhtinian terms, *Sans Soleil* uses a “directionality toward” its subjects, allowing both the words and the images of others to “sound” in their own right and then reflecting on the dialogic interactions of those soundings.

Given the essay’s capacity for demystification, reflexivity and dialogism, and given its tendency to question conventional and systematic thought via skepticism, filmmakers who wish to construct films that act as an intellectual arena for perusal of inquiry and thought are not surprisingly turning to the hybrid construction of the essay film. Since the essay is able to resist reified knowledge while continuously turning back to reflect on its own method, the essay opens up an intellectual space to reconsider taken-for-granted perspectives and approaches. The essay film, like its written counterpart, provides a fertile ground for filmmakers such as Marker to explore and denaturalize the binaries that often persist within cultural and political memory. Marker thus extends the principles of the essay I enumerated in Chapter One to a new medium – the essay film. In moving to this new medium – in using the essay’s reflexive and wandering attempts to sort out several intertwined mental knots and their various threads – Marker extends the essay’s critical and flexible power to a new set of inquiries grounded in the ways we see, represent, and remember our worlds.¹¹

5.3.1 I See Her, She Sees Me: Hybridity and Recognition

As mentioned above, a key way in which *Sans Soleil* is essayistic is in its complication of binaries such as subject and object, Western and Eastern, observer and observed. Each of these reified binaries is best unsettled in the memorable scenes which film the women of Guinea-Bissau. Here, the narrator is also the

¹¹ For a general introduction to all of Marker’s works, as well as his early intellectual history spanning book projects, photographic essays, and collaboration with other French filmmakers and intellectuals (particularly Resnais and André Bazin), Alter’s 2006 monograph entitled *Chris Marker* is once again a helpful resource.

filmmaker, the photographer, documenting women in the marketplace. Many ignore him and many purposefully ignore him, turning their backs exaggeratedly. His camera centers on one woman and, in a mid-shot, holds on her. The frame and his narration both observe her indirect recognition of his presence: “I see her. She sees me.” And yet she doesn’t look up to return his gaze, or that of the camera’s eye. The camera lingers on her....and finally, she does raise her eyes, if only for a single glance that lasts “1/24th of a second....the length of a frame of film.” The narrator muses:

My personal problem is more specific: how to film the ladies of Bissau? Apparently, the magical function of the eye was working against me there. It was in the marketplaces of Bissau and Cape Verde that I could stare at them again with equality: I see her, she saw me, she knows that I see her, she drops me her glance, but just at an angle where it is still possible to act as though it was not addressed to me, and at the end the real glance, straightforward, that lasted a twenty-fourth of a second, the length of a film frame.

Although seemingly occupying a traditional boundary – filmed and filmmaker, colonized and colonizer even – this sequence problematizes those relationships and opens up the fissures of uncertainty and reversed power within this particular instance. Here, the woman is in control – of herself, of her gaze, and in many ways of her participation and thus representation. It is in her own marketplace that the filmmaker is able to look at her “with equality” and consider what it might mean to represent her ethically. When she does glance up, she smiles.

Later, this image reappears: as one of several frozen stills solidifying moments in time, and as one of the images that will be distorted to question its nature *as* image. Later, a hybrid assortment of images will be passed through a visual synthesizer called “the zone,” distorting not only what they look like, but thus what they are able to show. Blending real and generated images, snippets of countries and people juxtaposed with lengthy sequences of banal actions, *Sans Soleil* also moves between genres – travelogue, extended meditation, epistolary form, philosophical treatise – creating an essay marked by hybridity. As Marker scholar Nora Alter notes, the soundtrack contributes to this multiplicitous effect, occasionally existing “in direct contradiction with the image track, creating within the total filmic text a jarring

collision of signs and various levels of meaning that the audience must coproduce” (19). The words, the signs and other media images, the questions posed by a voiceover narration twice removed, each emphasizes hybridity as central not only to the film’s explorations and arguments, but indeed to the very way it goes about exploring and arguing. Epistemological hybridity drives the explorations of cultural hybridity at the center of the film. And such an epistemology turns its gaze back on itself, questioning its own ethical cinematic and documentary imperatives.

If the power of the gaze represents the imperative to let others speak for themselves, this move is mirrored in the woman’s narration of the man’s thoughts and letters. Using multiple locales as a way to access a rich, hybrid sense of the global the film problematizes even this binary. Clearly, the essay’s resistance to easy definitions contributes this essential feature to the film. Working with concepts such as cultural memory, global interconnectedness, and the acts of looking, seeing, and being seen, Marker needs a mode beyond definition – visually or narratively based. Instead, he is able to use both word and image to “force the meanings” of these explorations “on farther” by way of the form of a wandering, meditative essay. Images and words alike accumulate, punctuate, and complicate. Sometimes seeming to argue, sometimes circling back to reframe what has been illustrated, they re-direct the conversation without necessarily worrying about tying up loose ends. Juxtaposition, repetition, and reflection supplant definition in *Sans Soleil*, producing a text which focuses substantially on the “how of expression” as well as the “how” of ethical representation.

Toward the end of *Sans Soleil* this self-skepticism is enacted through two types of images. The first type consists of several trembling frames, coupled by the narrator saying that he held the frame at “arm’s length, at zoom’s length.” The shots illustrate this action – focusing on an image than pulling back in order to mirror this reflexive distance, this process of deliberation. Following this series of images, we return to the zone where many of the images we have seen throughout the essay – celebrations and cats, children and the glance of a woman – are all filtered through the distorting machine. Here the film’s threads are suggestively drawn together and thus begin to create a kind of closure, albeit a closure which is, as the narrator says, “already effected by the moths of time.” As viewers, we are not permitted to

return nostalgically to these images as a way of residing in finality – the images have already shifted and we must reconsider how to view and understand both new images and old.

These two sets of speculative images create the essay film's intellectual arena. As described in Chapter One, the space and flexibility such a force field allows is crucial to the essay's foregrounding of the processes of thinking instead of positing thought as an objectified entity. Via reflexivity and the impetus to draw elements into juxtaposed interrelation, *Sans Soleil* creates such a force field where the writer and the reader of the letters, as well as the viewer, interact with both the words and the images. Both words and images emerge like memories jostled against one another, creating a constellation of meanings and possibilities. What is also created are processes of thinking and remembering grounded in ongoing, material reality (instead of removed from these realities.) In the realm of cinema, both words and images combine within the essay to push the meanings (of both words and images) farther – not through definition, but through juxtaposition and inter-mediation. This discursive and visual dialogic exchange suggests a heightened practice of inter-disciplinary work that subjects ideas, methodologies, and assumptions about the borders between disciplines to reconsideration. Chris Marker is a primary example of an artist engaged in this type of work, an artist who uses the essay's unmethodical method to exemplary effect. Embracing and putting the essay to use as the form which most radically makes visible and productive use of non-linear progression, non-definitional exploration, and a rigorous questioning of what we understand as perception and memory, history and truth, Marker's *Sans Soleil* rightly stands as an essay film par excellence.

This is the case even in the finale of the film – the moment in which it is hardest to resist offering a final framework or gesturing toward how all threads may be tied together. Yet the essay film does not buckle under the pressure to achieve closure. Instead, it makes visible this impossibility and takes on a demystifying approach; it “thinks in fragments just as reality is fragmented and gains its unity only by moving through the fissures, rather than by smoothing them over” (Adorno, 164). Certainly the disparate images we see throughout *Sans Soleil*, and the movement between images without clear transitions, evidence this resistance of closure in favor of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and questioning. Indeed, we

end the film with a question, which suspends the closure of the film indefinitely, and brings no tidy answers to viewers. We cannot sum up, but must sort through and piece together our understandings as we will. We must ask alongside the film: “Will there be a last letter?”

5.3.2 Material Texture, Electronic Texture: Juxtaposition as Epistemology

As described above, *Sans Soleil* favors provocative juxtaposition in order to create a more speculative space. Drawing on documentary techniques more than narrative storyline – yet complicating both strategies – the essay film positions both the narrating subject and the viewer as needing to come to their own conclusions when confronted with the range of images and representational practices the film contains.

The film’s most provocative example of juxtaposition as epistemology occurs in “the zone,” the aforementioned distorted and blurry projection of memory and reality. As the zone’s creator, Hayao Yamaneko, puts it, the images that are distorted by his synthesizer are “less deceptive than those you see on the television. At least they proclaim themselves to be what they are: images, not the portable and compact form of an already inaccessible reality.” Yamaneko passes central images we’ve encountered in *Sans Soleil* through the zone, lingering on their distortions until viewers are able to discern them. The space given to contemplation here encourages the juxtaposition of the distorted – but perhaps “less deceptive” and more “real” – images alongside the images we recall from earlier in the film. This juxtaposition also importantly reflects on the very nature of the image, as well as how images are frozen or change in both memory and representations. Yamaneko can thus claim that the synthesizer’s “electronic texture” exists as the only means to scrutinize “sentiment, memory, and imagination” – a tripartite of intellectual operations that exist at the convergence of our ability to know.

The space of the zone, like the essay’s intellectual arena, transforms thinking from product into process and, in so doing, makes visible and active the processes by which we think without removing thought itself from its material, ongoing reality. Translating and mutating fixed images (which persist as

memories and thus representations of the past) through the zone, these images escape their stable, product-oriented status to instead occupy a place of comparison and reflection. Adorno would describe this process as the essay eschewing methodically stacked, discrete bits of thought or idea, choosing instead to draw ideas into fundamentally charged inter-meaning with one another: Although the images themselves do not crystallize in *Sans Soleil* without being called into question – put through “the zone,” as it were – the relationship between images and words does begin to crystallize as a force field promoting intellectual engagement. The images and their conscious juxtaposition demand our attention, our participation, and our consideration. This is the challenge of the essay.

Much of this challenge arises from the way in which the essay calls into radical question thought as a linear and continuous construct via its “epistemological motive.” The form embodies this motive via continuity understood as discontinuity. Although viewers are guided from image to image, country to country, in a seeming haphazard fashion, eventually this structure and the meditations that accompany it begin to cohere. In this way, the essay is able to engage and sustain what might otherwise seem paradoxical through its critical ability to resist a totalizing framework, even as it attempts and tests this negotiation. Juxtaposition is crucial here, opening up space for questioning, considering, and attempting understanding. Why does the Guinea-Bissau woman lower her eyes and why does she raise them? What is important both about capturing this moment and calling attention to the way the moment is captured? Using juxtaposition as the primary epistemology for the film, Marker allows viewers to question how and what this essay film is testing, what structures it resists (and why), and how would we characterize the way the film seeks to know and have us know. Removed from our ability to rely on narrative or linearity to structure our conclusions, we must find different ways of engaging and understanding what we see and what we think about what we see.

Political footage and altered images. A woman’s glance. Fictional voices and fictional places and yet the semblance of truth. A leader of black film framing an image of children, an image already obsolete due to a volcanic eruption and its fallout. Eyes watching us as we watch back. And the blurring in the zone. Spanning archival, filmed, and found footage, we are guided only by letters from faraway

places. We encounter the juxtaposed world anew, afresh, struggling for sense in the words and images that shift and repeat. Adrift alongside an unseen voice, we encounter things that might easily be left out – a flawed image or take, the “subject’s” taking notice of the observer, the fissures, the celluloid itself. Images and arguments that don’t readily fit. And yet which exist in this essay nonetheless.

In both the theoretical and discursive readings I’ve laid out above, Marker’s work embodies the essayistic impetus I’ve described throughout this dissertation. Working inside the essay – confronting those excesses and difficulties that don’t already map onto something we recognize or know – Marker epitomizes the essay’s intellectual arena and its critical, reflexive, and worldly qualities through the cinematic medium. Through the essay film, atomistic separation and over-delimited conceptualization are replaced by *San Soleil*’s dialogism and interaction. Working against a linear development of thought, concepts can thus develop in play with each other, interweaving and creating rich tapestries of meaning. The density of *Sans Soleil* is certainly one of the defining and determining characteristics of the film. It is this density of intellectual enterprises – captured, scrutinized, considered, and questioned through reflexive writing and representation – that results in the thinker transforming the self “into an arena of intellectual experience, without simplifying it” (Adorno, 160-1). Here, however, the “thinker” is not easily reducible to the narrator of the film (himself a semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical figure obscured further through pseudonym and through a differently gendered narrating of the letters). Instead, the thinker that is the arena of intellectual experience is the film itself and, in the way the viewer meaningfully interacts and extends the film, the hermeneutic exchange between essay film and essay-interlocutor.

Rightly recognized as the master of the essay film, Marker continues to push, redefine, and play with the possibilities of the essay beyond *Sans Soleil*. Using intertextuality, reflexivity, and hybrid movements between discourses, ways of thinking, and means of experiencing constitutive of the form, Marker has extended his reach to museum installations and even to an interactive essay on CD-Rom, entitled *Immemory*. Just as the original release of *Sans Soleil* expanded the borders of the essay through solidifying the essay film as an important cinematic genre, Marker’s new constellation-based disc

continues to open up new trajectories for the essay. As viewers navigate the disc in any number of ways on his or her own, traces of Montaigne's *Essais* – with their conglomeration of juxtaposed sayings, observations, and reflections – persist....yet they also connect, in hypertextual fashion, to contemporary digital projects and essays. Throughout his work, Marker tests the possibilities of the essay, continuously attempting to, as Alter puts it, “conceptualize the essay as a three-dimensional form” beyond the page and even, through his recent work in installations, beyond the screen. The way Marker has experimented across media – from film to television, interactive CD-Rom to museum installation – prompts us to consider not only what is specific to particular media, but what traits can also persist across media. Although I have argued that the essay persists as a knowledge possibility capable of existing beyond writing, it should be clear, too, that a crucial part of the essay's value exists in the ways it foregrounds the material elements of the media in which it is composed. As *Sans Soleil*'s narrator flashes images of “things that quicken the heart,” the film points back to Sei Shonagon's 11th century pillow book writings that contained a similar list. Yet the essay film simultaneously points forward to new realms the essay can inhabit. Where will this style of hybrid interaction, restless questioning, provocative juxtaposition, tentative conclusions, and persistent reflection lead us next? And what will it allow us to know?

5.4 HYBRID AESTHETICS AND DISPLACEMENT STRATEGIES: WONG KAR-WAI AND *IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE*

One direction these hybrid interactions and persistent reflections lead us is toward Hong Kong filmmaker Wong Kar-wai. The trajectory this project has presented makes a jump here into the new millennium due to the ways that Wong creates hybrid, reflexive essay films in ways that differ substantially from Marker's often cited and easy to recognize essay films. This section presents the context of Wong's most essayistic film – *In the Mood for Love* – emphasizing, in particular, the cultural instability of Hong Kong's current situation. After situating the work of this film and describing its connections to both

composition and the essay, I argue that *In the Mood for Love* offers a new type of essayism grounded in strategies of displacement and inscription on the image. These combined theoretical and aesthetic strategies make use of essayistic tendencies in order to ethically represent cultural difference, flux, and possibility. Thus, this final section on Wong Kar-wai will, I hope, extend our understanding of the essay film by dealing with a contemporary director who is not typically addressed. I also hope that my extension of essay film theory will provide a way to better understand the work of essayistic writing through complex cultural lenses and praxis, as well as to suggest the possibilities for essayistic production beyond the printed page.

I have found it particularly important to consider Wong Kar-wai since he has been making films actively since the late 1980's but has only recently been paid significant critical attention. As critics begin to attend to his work, however, he is quickly emerging as one of the most important practitioners in contemporary, global cinema.¹² Critics now beginning to theorize Wong's work most often focus their inquiries on his use of form, questioning why his films seem so different and striking from other contemporary films and how, in turn, to classify and theorize this aesthetic. For example, critic Peter Brunette argues that it is Wong's eschewal of conventions that influence so much of Hong Kong cinema that leads to a richer body of work and one that demands consideration. Brunette's focus dovetails with my project in his emphasis on hybridity – he writes that Wong's "greatest triumphs have come when he has transcended generic conventions" and combined those genres usually separated. Brunette extends this analysis to the specifics of Wong's visual style, coining the phrase "graphic expressivity" to describe Wong's work. In more pointed terms, critic Curtis K. Tsui argued as early as 1995 that form was "the essence" of Wong's films instead of narrative, writing that "It's not a case of style over substance; rather, it's style as substance" (94). These understandings of Wong's formal achievements are particularly instructive in relation to his 1997 film *Happy Together*, his recent release *2046*, and particularly the 2000 *In the Mood for Love*, the focus of my exploration below. Often regarded as Wong's most accomplished

¹² 2005 marked the publication of the first manuscript length critical volumes concerning Wong, including volumes by Peter Brunette and Stephen Teo.

and sumptuous film thus far in his career, *Mood* uses a controlled, stylized aesthetic to convey the anticipatory and longing atmosphere at the center of the film, while at the same time deploying this aesthetic as a critical examination of Hong Kong's place in a globalized world.

To best understand the import of the film, Wong's work should be contextualized by contemporary patterns of filmmaking. *In the Mood for Love* participates in the recent trend of films that take the past as their contemporary subjects. Films such as in Todd Haynes' *Far from Heaven* (2002) overtly re-make earlier films, while other films – such as Stephen Daldry's *The Hours* (2002), Gary Ross' 1998 *Pleasantville*, or Ang Lee's *The Ice Storm* (1997) – complicate our relationship to moments in history and their representations. Although often characterized as nostalgic, these films do more than return in time to recapture something of the past. Likewise, films which make use of a stylized, often saturated, aesthetic have been criticized for their surface level beauty which, some argue, lacks substance, depth, import, or politics.¹³ This inverse relation of aesthetic to depth prompts me to reconsider how discussions of aesthetics and style can, especially within popular discourse, flatten to attend to only those elements of beauty without considering the important role aesthetics play in contributing to salient meanings of films or other texts. Particularly in relation to Wong's work, one recent trend centers on delineating aesthetics along binary trajectories – European or Chinese? Postmodern or decidedly modern? For my purposes, however, I'd like to argue that Wong's films function at the intersection of these trajectories, confounding them and expanding the range of what is possible in terms of expressive, imagistic representation. Most central to situating Wong's work is the place of Hong Kong, itself.

Thus, although *In the Mood for Love* is often read as nostalgic, sentimental, or “merely beautiful,” and Wong's style is increasingly (and puzzlingly to my mind) described as an “MTV style,” I contend that these traits are indicative of a larger inquiry into the themes of disappearance, displacement, and the emergent history of the city of Hong Kong. Wong Kar-wai's investigation of time and space in this film are suggestive of larger intersections between attempts to preserve (and perhaps retrospectively

¹³ See discourse surrounding Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, as well as critiques of films directed by Zhang Yimou, particularly his film *Hero*, whose cinematographer Christopher Doyle has also directed the cinematography for the majority of Wong's films.

create) a memory of Hong Kong in the face of what Hong Kong critic Ackbar Abbas, in his text *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, calls a “politics of disappearance.” Through an interrogation of time and space, and via a guiding metaphor of displacement, *In the Mood for Love* negotiates simultaneity, hybridity, competing interests and competing histories. The film as both product and process thus provides ways to consider the role style plays in advanced compositions.

More specifically, the essay, as I have argued in Chapter 4 and throughout this chapter, provides an especial model of productive encounters with others driven by contemplation and patience. Considering the film’s epistemology, hybridity, and style, this section suggests how *In the Mood for Love* works as an essay film in its own right, and how we might theorize the particular traits of this essay as illustrative for our purposes in teaching writing. I begin with a description of the film’s production where I argue that the process of composing the film illustrates salient essayistic traits. I then continue with my reading of the film and the way it engages in the cultural politics of a hybrid, in-flux Hong Kong. I articulate what the film offers in terms of representing and negotiating identity and subjectivity, as well as what the film contributes to our understanding of style and aesthetics. Combined, these evaluations provide one way of thinking about composing across media while remaining faithful to the types of essayism this dissertation has provided.

5.4.1 Wong Kar-wai’s Essay Film, or What *In the Mood for Love* Can Teach Us About Composition

Watching the controlled precision of *In the Mood for Love*’s cinematography, it is easy to see why this film took over two years to film, edit, and construct. Yet knowing a few things about Wong’s notorious filming and production style belies the controlled product presented by the film. Well-known for surpassing budget and time constraints, Wong most often films more than one project at once, resulting in resonances across multiple works. *In the Mood for Love*, like most of Wong’s projects, was filmed in concert with another film, *2046* (released 2004.) When on location in Bangkok for *2046*, Wong Kar-wai

re-shot most of the exterior footage for *Mood* in addition to shooting the scenes diegetically taking place in Singapore. Narratively, the film spans four years – 1962-1966 (the beginning of the Cultural Revolution) and three places: Hong Kong, Singapore, and finally, Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Overdue and way over budget, the film was rush-finished to premiere at Cannes in 2000; when it was shown, not even the director had viewed the final print.¹⁴

I'll pause here to provide a narrative sketch of the film. *In the Mood for Love* is ostensibly the story of two neighbors who come to realize that their spouses are having an affair with each other. The film is not directly about these failed relationships; indeed, the spouses are never shown except in glimpses and from behind. Instead, the film speculates on both the past and the future as the two neighbors (depicted by actors Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung) develop their own relationship based on their attempts to understand (by enacting or, as they call it, “rehearsing”) how their spouses’ affair might have begun and how it proceeded. Thus, while the film can certainly be read as a 1960s period piece – something that Wong Kar-wai acknowledges in interviews where he discusses his own youth in Hong Kong in this period and the desire to preserve something in the rapidly changing landscape – the film also bears the traces of other, more substantial, tensions. Using both Shanghainese and Cantonese languages, the film explores the Shanghainese emigrant population that lives in the building. Mrs. Chan (Cheung) is Shanghainese; Mr. Chow (Leung) is Cantonese, and the film looks back to the 1949 mass emigration from Shanghai just as it looks ahead to 2046, the hotel room number where Chan and Chow rendezvous and the year in which the “one country, two systems” philosophy will end and Hong Kong will be reabsorbed by mainland China.

These cultural politics act as the undercurrent of the film and thus supplement the hybrid nature of Chan and Chow’s encounter and relationship. As I will explore more fully below, this hybridity is powerfully captured through the filmic image in ways that allow a complex, highly reflexive attempt at understanding both a local situation (the relationship between the two) and think through the global

¹⁴ See David Bordwell’s chapters “Avant-Pop Cinema” and “Romance on Your Menu” in *Planet Hong Kong* for a detailed sense of Wong’s production, filming, editing, and overall financial processes.

uncertainty of a larger sphere (Hong Kong and its relationships to the larger cultural and political powers that seek to determine its future.)

Given the essayistic “thinking via the image” that Wong constructs, a bit more information about the composition is worth noting. In addition to the hybrid nature of Wong’s filming style, it is important to stress that most of his films are shot largely without a script. Thus, each of these aspects of Wong’s filmmaking process – changing both scripting and locations on a daily basis while working to complete multiple projects – owes much to Wong’s ability to revise. Constantly adapting the structure, action, and style of the film as the work goes along, Wong’s projects never fulfill a predetermined goal, but shift and accommodate new developments and new ideas. Projects remain open-ended and in constant flux until they must be finished and presented.

It is thus possible to make several comparisons of Wong’s production style to the composition process, depending on the ways in which we understand revision itself. Is Wong similar to the student-writer who never feels finished with a particular piece, always striving to further perfect it, always wishing for more time? Or is Wong similar to the professional writer or intellectual scholar in his ability to stay inside a particular piece for years on end, keeping himself open to radical change and revision along the way? I see Wong moving between these two positions – positions which are not, as I argued in Chapter One, as distanced from one another as we might think. More than waiting for romantic inspiration to strike, both writers maintain a desire to “get it right” while remaining open to what the “right” thing might be. Staying inside a composition – living inside it as it were – shows a commitment to crafting and re-crafting and a willingness to change, “re-shoot,” or abandon aspects of the project entirely. This open patience best reveals itself in subtle, multi-layered compositions that feel controlled, thought-through, and fully resonant.

Hence, Wong’s lengthy revision process is central in creating this essay film’s primary epistemology of displacement which I trace more fully below. Since displacement demands that the composition must work subtly, nearly subliminally, without reducing itself to easy substitutions that overdraw experience, this epistemology requires evocative, well-drawn connections between the

representation and the absent referent. Just as actor Tony Leung (Mr. Chow) expressed his interest in seeing how the parts of the film would unite to create a successful representation both diegetically and allegorically – “I’m really excited what the story will turn out to be,” he noted – Wong uses the revision process to explore resonances between multiple layers of the film’s composition.

Combining the forces of subtlety and contemplation, the film’s epistemology of displacement is thus able to use one thing to talk about another – here, the fraught and uncertain relationship between Chow and Chan and the similarly fraught and unstable position of Hong Kong as an autonomous nation-state. The composition thus achieves the goal of extending beyond the literal to function on an allegorical level as well. Working dialectically, ideas and images are extended to a broader, cultural and political level, yet this broader level of concerns cycles back to influence the more literal level, imbuing specific images with a hue of added tension. Although achieving such a textual movement presents an ambitious goal for many writing classrooms to work toward, sustained revision does make possible an attention to both local and global concerns essential to most successful compositions. As seen in the film, *In the Mood for Love*’s detailed, textured images imply larger cultural concerns – each level functioning interactively. Such a reciprocal relationship between aspects of text makes visible a particular trait of writing that is often valued but perhaps not often voiced or made visible in classrooms.

One key way that the essay film strengthens the connection between specific elements of the film and narrative and their larger, implicit tensions is through the link between word and image. Similar to the ways that Said’s text and Mohr’s images work to expand the meaning of each (instead of explaining or illustrating one by the other) as I explained in the previous chapter, Wong’s films rely on a literary impulse to push the meanings of the visual representations further. Often expressed through epigraphic statements, words act to widen the frame of the film’s actions, highlight particular elements, or extend the reach of the narrative’s import. Wong often connects himself to literature, citing his love for and influence by particular writers (notably, Julio Cortázar, Manuel Puig, and Liu Yi-Chang.)¹⁵ Critic

¹⁵ Wong notes the influence of Hong Kong fiction writer Liu Yi-Chang, particularly his story “Intersections” which served as the original idea for *Mood* (the full story appears in the liner notes to the Criterion DVD.) The story centers on an older

Stephen Teo points to Wong's use of the written word in the structuring of narratives which often weave several storylines together through fragments, and in his focus on character, character depth, and dialogue. Especially in Wong's use of weighty intertitles and epigraphs excerpted from literature, Teo notes the way that Wong's "films offer a balance, it is a balance between the visual image and the written word" (163).¹⁶ Constant revision of the dialogue, the structure, and the actual scenes in the film allows for the relationship between word and image to be furthered strengthened.

Each of these elements – a reliance on substantial, sustained revision, work that painstakingly works to attend to both local and global concerns within the composition, and the ability of the composition to function through subtle, contemplative resonances – allows the essay film to function on multiple levels. A steadfast commitment to revision is central to achieving the subtle, nuanced tensions within the film, and thus the range of rich interpretations it makes possible. Revision is visible both within the film – repeated sequences which shift a little each time, such as Chow and Chan passing on the stairs or rehearsing the affair, can be read as both diegetic and stylistic revisions – as well as made apparent through the para-cinematic supplements to the primary text. For example, the DVD contains a deleted scene depicting Chow and Chan consummating their relationship in room 2046. Including this deletion within the film's attendant materials makes visible a particular revision and how it affects the film as a whole – useful lesson for composers thinking about the ramifications of their textual choices. This example makes clear how removing this scene (just before the debut of the film at Cannes) removes a too-easy conclusion in favor of a more nuanced portrayal. Since it seems necessary that Chow and Chan do not participate in a physical relationship on screen in order to intensify the sense of longing and waiting and thus to force the audience into a similar position of delayed or absent gratification, this

Shanghainese man and a young girl and their separate but similar encounters of Hong Kong at very different moments in their lives. Since the narrative of the film is different, the connection to this story seems most apparent in the mood, movement, and some of the film's locations. It is also interesting to note the ways that *In the Mood for Love* bears semblances of Antonioni's themes, especially those of *Blow-Up*; Wong has spoken several times about both his admiration for Antonioni and the influence of short-story fictionalist Julio Cortázar on the construction of his narrative lines. Cortázar's story originally entitled "Las Babas del Diablo" (translated "Blow-Up") inspired Antonioni's film of the same name.

¹⁶ Teo's argument often privileges the biographical. Wong's stated influence by particular authors thus provides Teo a frame by which to understand Wong in the particular, biographical terms that mark his argument.

particular revision strengthens the general project of the film and succeeds in not reducing interpretative possibilities.¹⁷ In addition to highlighting the film's essayistic process of investigation and coming to know, attending to such aspects of revision and compositional restructuring makes visible important strategies for advanced composition.

5.4.2 Style in Slow Motion: A Reading of *In the Mood for Love*

As I've begun to suggest above, the traits of the essay this dissertation has outlined and valued are essential to creating and supporting the unique style of this essay film. If *Sans Soleil* creates an intellectually driven and highly reflexive essay concerning the nature of subjects and their representations in a growing global world, *In the Mood for Love* meditates on similar concerns through a highly stylized and interpersonal narrative that stands in for the inescapably global position of Hong Kong. Since *In the Mood for Love* functions essayistically yet differently from the most popularly-cited example *Sans Soleil*, the film's aesthetic and its relationship to the film's essayistic impetus demands substantial scrutiny.

As mentioned above, instead of functioning primarily through the narrative of the film or the discourse of the characters, the hybridity of the film is best expressed through the film's overall aesthetic. This aesthetic of course includes the film's music, including a reoccurring waltz which acts as the main theme for the film, music that Wong describes as the dictating tempo to which the film was constructed. This waltz is borrowed from an earlier Japanese film by Suzuki Seijun, suggestive perhaps of the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong from December, 1941 until July, 1945. There is also substantial traditional Chinese music alongside American songs performed in Spanish by Nat King Cole (the Spanish recalls another substantial immigrant population from the Philippines). At the end of the film, the

¹⁷ Such revisions and their effects are of course subject to debate, as any revisions might be. However, contrary to some critics' description of the film's narrative ambiguity concerning the "nature" of the relationship as a type of failure, I would argue that the question of whether Chow and Chan actually consummate their love is purposefully left undecided, as made evident by the deleted scenes included on the DVD. For an example of such a claim, see Stephen Teo's argument that the mystery of the narrative results in "an impasse" prompted by Wong's incremental and non-linear production of the film in his chapter "Betrayed by Maggie Cheung" (124).

carefully controlled and stylized aesthetic is disrupted by documentary footage of Charles de Gaulle deplaning in Cambodia and meeting the royal family in preparation for his 1966 speech in Phnom Penh criticizing U.S. actions in Vietnam. These intersections recall Hong Kong's various relationships with other countries, and thus further suggest the long-unsettled place of Hong Kong as a city governed by growth spurts and periods of waiting, fits and starts, a history in the process of being made even as it anticipates the future. Beneath the film's narrative of love, betrayal, and secrecy, this is the narrative that underscores the film. In this way, the film makes use of a recursive epistemology – circling back to earlier moments, earlier and ongoing national relationships, even recurring musical themes – to probe and reconsider the position and possibility of both the characters and their city.

Time thus serves as a central element in the film, not only in terms of the narrative and the emphasis on the passage of time and waiting, but formally through Wong's manipulation of time. Time is most evocatively marked by the changing of Mrs. Chan's gorgeous cheongsam (the traditional Chinese dress), which film critic Stephen Teo describes as the "most aesthetic marker of time ever exhibited in cinema" (128). Culturally, time is marked by the types of seasonal food being prepared and eaten throughout the film. Thus, time becomes coded most forcefully through everyday phenomenon. A particular repeated motif – Mrs. Chan and Mr. Chow passing in the cramped stairway on their way to the noodle stand – exemplifies the way that both space and time are problematized formally in the film.¹⁸ Like many shots in the film, the passing in the stairway is often shot around corners and at angles, destabilizing the notion of a stable, fully knowable space and replacing it with space that is limited, constricted, and broken up.

These sequences also contain a unique and important Wong technique: sequences are slowed until they are not quite slow motion, but drawn out nonetheless. These moments erect an intermediary

¹⁸ The thermos that Mrs. Chan carries in these scenes is suggestive of the traditional Shanghai practice of fetching hot water from a nearby local stand, often attached to a noodle shop as well. Culturally, this motif recalls both the historicity of the practice (before hot water was largely available) as well as the extent to which many Shanghainese still practice these, or similar, localized acts. For a larger discussion of this topic see "Away from Nanking Road: Small Stores and Neighborhood Life in Modern Shanghai" by Hanchao Lu (*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1995, 54:1, 93-123).

sort of time. Here, the movements of the actors become slightly accentuated, as if time were elongated or stretched beyond its usual duration.¹⁹ Diegetic features such as light and rain are aestheticized to create further attention to and meditation on this liminal time. Additionally, Wong's multiple pans work to displace Chow and Chan's bodies as they pass through space, frequently multiplying their images in mirrors. In this latter case, the image of a body becomes prismatic, as in the case of Mrs. Chow flanked by mirrors. Such staging positions her as looking both backward to the past and forward to the future in the reflections, while at the same time positioning her physical body as just slightly off-center, indicating a skewed present time. Narratively, these reflections highlight the shadow performances that the neighbors play in rehearsing the affair of the spouses. In this sense, the neighbors displace themselves into the roles of their spouses and are thus always precariously balanced and shifting between two relationships, marked imagistically by the use of mirrors, repetitive pans, the use of shadows and substantial vertical barring often laid over the characters. The significance of Wong's manipulation of both temporal and spatial configurations lies beyond the literal. Instead, it suggestively positions Hong Kong, itself, at the juncture of these uncertain conditions and shifting spatio-temporal relations.

Essential to these meditations on time and space is the element of repetition. In addition to drawing attention to the ways that time and space are relayed by the film and thus asking viewers to meditate on these representation, repetition serves a figurative purpose of illustrating a sense of limited or stalled action. In his essay on repetition, Kierkegaard explores the types of movement that repetition engenders, beginning by positioning repetition as an obverse corollary to recollection: "repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward" (102-3). Kierkegaard thus situates repetition as a kind of mediatory or transitory force as it must move between something already done and

¹⁹ For another approach to representing the movements of time, see Peter Greenaway's pastiche-like film, *The Pillow Book*, which takes as its inspiration the writings of 11th century Japanese lady Sei Shonagon. Like the book, Greenaway's film explores the hybrid nature of observation, expression, and writing through a hybrid visual style and a strong thematic of writing on the material body. Beautifully filmed and constructed, Greenaway explores the juxtaposition of time through occasionally including small windows of future action within the main frame of action. This spatially layered and temporally hybrid effect functions differently than Wong's use of drawn out time, but is certainly worth further attention for the way Greenaway suspends multiple images over one another to create a rich and dialogic representation.

the “new” element always created in the repeated act. It is this newness, it seems, which propels repetition into the future instead of tying it to a nostalgic, recollected past. Yet the situation is precarious, as Kierkegaard exhibits in the essay, especially through either attempts to repeat without change or to repeat when the contingent aspects of life are ever-changing. As seen in *Mood*, Chow and Chan can never reconstruct or repeat the actions of their absent spouses; however, a new element is created between the two as they attempt to move forward through these acts of repetition. What results is a portrayal of the characters, and figuratively of Hong Kong itself, which continue to move forward despite a constant spiraling-back-motion, or perhaps, because of it. This motion further suggests the larger cultural relationships and tensions between Hong Kong and the multiple cultural zones it has occupied: colonial zone, diasporic community, occupied city, somewhat independent part of a larger national whole (China), and finally, an imagined reconnected space governed by the mainland.

The movement and structure of *In the Mood for Love* is thus guided narratively by the oscillation between what was and what could be (the spouses’ affair and whether Chow and Chan will act similarly.) But the formal features of the film resound beyond the narrative and establish the essayistic tone of the film above and beyond the narrative line. For even as we, the viewers, long for the consummation of the relationship – mirroring Chow and Chan’s own palpable, if restrained, desire – it is the visual representations of time and space that prevent the possible communion. Thus, the essay film explores the range of possibilities for connection on the interpersonal and national levels simultaneously, circling back to remembered moments or things that might have happened differently as a way to project hopes, desires, and contingencies. The route for both Chow and Chan and the city of Hong Kong is not straightforward, but elliptical. Time stretches out, heightening the sensory and perhaps expanding the window of opportunity. Space intervenes to both allow the shadow performance of the two protagonists and to prevent the two from sharing the same intimate space, consistently holding them apart or barring their actions no matter where they try to come together. Swinging between the possible and the impossible, the film meditates on each, particularly through repeated actions which change and shift slightly. It is the essay film’s atmosphere and the movement – set to the beautiful, yet uneven, pace of a

waltz – that achieves the poignant and evocative exploration of both past and future, an exploration that points outside of itself to stand in for the whole of Hong Kong’s political and cultural uncertainty.

5.4.3 Shadows of the Future Recalled in the Past: Displacement as a Theory of Cultural Politics

In the above reading of the film’s aesthetic, I hope it has become clear how the inquiry into Hong Kong’s instability is displaced onto the interpersonal anticipation of relationship between characters Chow and Chan. This section further explores this theory of displacement as an addition to other theories of the film in order to stress this essayistic technique (using one thing to talk about another.) I also argue in this section that *In the Mood for Love* is useful for exploring how complex, contemporary, multimedia compositions explore destabilized positions of subjects within our rapidly changing moment. This section considers both the destabilization of audience members and the destabilization of identity in order to demonstrate how emerging forms that nonetheless continue to be essayistic in nature illustrate the ways that such rhetorically-oriented categories, like audience, can no longer be singularly defined and unified. I will take the issue of destabilized and globalized audience first in dialogue with critic Rey Chow and in conversation with cinematic theories of excess. I then turn to Hong Kong critic Ackbar Abbas to assist my consideration of destabilized subjecthood and identity.

As discussed above, *Mood* participates in the recent trend of cinematic representations of the past, although not in simply reductive or nostalgic ways. Critic Rey Chow particularizes this trend by positioning *Mood* as participating in the recent Chinese cinema trend of the “sentimentalism of nostalgia” which she defines as a “mode of filmmaking that often invokes specific eras of the past as its collective imaginary, and that consciously deploys everyday phenomena, including banal human relationships, familiar locations, and mundane objects, as a means of signifying....without reducing the historically precedent...to a simply naturalistic reality” (640).²⁰ Chow notes that the effect of this filmmaking is to

²⁰ For a productive discussion of nostalgia too lengthy to address here, including historical and etymological contexts, see Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001.) Particularly suggestive is her assertion that

“raise questions about the exact relationship between the everyday as such and its historical referent”; thus the aesthetic of the film is achieved by focusing on the everyday and the mood created – tempered anticipation, quiet forlornness, and longing(648). Such an atmospheric style allows the film to point beyond its own narrative and characters to non-diegetic forces or realities which are instrumental in structuring the film. Thus, the film situates itself somewhere between the diegetic plot and the larger cultural forces which impact everyday experience – in this case, Hong Kong’s precarious and evolving political, economic, and cultural self-definition.

Chow goes on to argue that it is the very richness and fullness of the images, colors, and sounds I’ve described above that become a “screen for a fundamental lack” (649). This lack is realized in the film most forcefully with the anti-climactic final scene among the ravaged ruins of Cambodia’s Angkor Wat. Here, Mr. Chow whispers the secret of his love for Mrs. Chan into a hole in a tree, a space which will guard his secret according to cultural tradition. Indeed, the secret is guarded even from viewers, as we are not privy to hearing the actual words. The stylized aesthetic the film establishes thus becomes a way to make visible the absence that lays beneath (or beyond, either in the past and/or the future) that aesthetic. Revising Pasolini’s formulation of the cinema’s double nature which tends toward both the literal and the metaphoric at the same time, Chow notes the paradoxical situation of contemporary “sentimental” films which have taken on “a life of rapid circulation ...turning the most locally specific everyday elements simultaneously into the most fabulous, because infinitely transmissible, phantasmagorias” (650-1). Thus, in a globalized context, the local and concrete (the literal) become read as the metaphorical: as “audiences scan spectacles without necessarily knowing anything about the historical specifics behind them, the ‘metaphorical’ side of film tends to take over, translating or reducing even the most local details into generalizable events...[and thus] enabling ‘communication’ at the transcultural level” (651). Situating contemporary Chinese cinema thus at the juncture of questions regarding critical and ethical practice, she questions the extent to which *Mood* relays “an anonymous,

nostalgia is a historical emotion intimately animated by crises of space and time: nostalgia is “a longing for that shrinking ‘space of experience’ that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations” (10).

hence globally interchangeable, part object, whose defining character is no longer history but image, artifice, and commodity” (653).

As I’ve shown above, I agree with Rey Chow’s characterization of the way the film points outside itself – outside the easily graspable “love story” – to the larger forces which are implicated in the film. And certainly we might agree that the reception of *Mood* has been largely as Chow suggests – focusing on the affect of these images and the international success of this film and its director.²¹ But in positioning the film as primarily “sentimental” – an affect which supports the “generalizable” and “transcultural” reception of the film as artifice removed from historical contingencies – Chow reduces the complexity of the film. Therefore, I’d like to stress the characteristic of displacement I discussed above in order to modify Chow’s assertion that the local is, in these films, understood as the global. Introducing a theory of displacement shifts the ground of the argument away from the questions of (mis)readership that Chow privileges. My contention is that despite the fact that viewers may translate the local into the global, perhaps inadvertently reducing the “locally specific” to the “infinitely transmissible,” a theory of displacement offers us a way to re-link the two together by understanding the ways that a specific cultural representation is displaced onto a specific interpersonal representation. In this way, Chow and Chan’s difficult relationship not only suggests, but necessitates an acknowledgment of Hong Kong’s difficulty as the absent referent. In this way, displacement also acknowledges the constitutive excesses of the film as contributing to the film instead of obscuring or functioning solely as lack. Understood in light of *In the Mood for Love*, a theory of displacement directs viewers to the ways that the narrative and its use of everyday objects and a remembered time and place continue to point to a broader sense of cultural and political history, albeit a specific history to Hong Kong.²²

²¹ It may serve to remember here the acclaim that *In the Mood for Love* received: a slew of Best Foreign Film Awards, Hong Kong Film awards, as well as Best Actor and the Technical Grand Prize at Cannes. *Mood* is easily Wong’s most acclaimed film to date, challenged only by the recent success of *2046*.

²² This is not to say that Chow’s concerns via the local understood as global are not valid and timely, as well as suggestive of the difficulties surrounding globalized visuality. In this case, however, a bit more needs to be said about the specific workings of Wong’s film, particularly the ways that the visual style of the film resists being too easily reducible to either narrative line or reinterpretations of the past.

Heightening this aesthetic of displacement are the “excesses” I’ve just mentioned. Film theorist Kristin Thompson has most recently and succinctly described excess as it relates to cinematic representation. She defines excess as “those aspects of the work which are not contained by its [the film’s] unifying forces” (487). Film theorist Leo Charney further contextualizes this definition, writing that:

[E]xcess is endemic to film narrative. Despite the frame’s symbolic effort to contain the film inside discernible boundaries, any film is fraught with aspects of simultaneity, multiplicity, and materiality that define its textual excess” (23).²³

In both of these explanations, excess and style are closely linked and both rely on a certain hybrid flexibility. Style differs from excess in the ways certain elements become markedly characteristic of the work – Thompson asserts that it is the work of the viewer to negotiate the tensions between a film’s excesses and the elements that are more readily legible. In sum, excess provides a way to theorize what the film image offers that lies beyond the scope of the narrative and the film’s discursive features. In many ways, then, acknowledging excess allows us to recognize material differences inherent in the film medium. And, as Thompson suggests, paying attention to those elements of the film which exceed a narrative motivation can “help us to be aware of how the whole film – not just its narrative – works upon our perception” (498).

This is particularly the case in Wong’s films as I’ve evidenced above. The excesses of repetition, of saturated color and persistent, repetitive musical motifs, the excess of anticipation relayed through seemingly endless passings-on-the-stairs – each helps to push the film’s aesthetic to a heightened state of both beauty and frustration. Such excesses are not merely commodified repetitions, however, as Rey Chow seems to suggest, but instrumental repetitions illustrating the unknowability of both the past and the future at the literal and allegorical levels. Although aesthetically captivating, the film’s aesthetic excesses rebuke easy resolution or stable interpretation. This anti-epistemology is directly connected to

²³ See Charney’s article “Historical Excess” for a summary of the major differences between theoretical approaches to excess and for an example, the film *Johnny Guitar*, which marries social context to formal strategies through a strategy of containment of excess.

the film's exploration of the destabilized culture identities of Hong Kong citizens, particularly in relationship to the city's shifting cultural relationships. Along these lines, Hong Kong critic Ackbar Abbas offers a rich discussion of Hong Kong's unsteady presence both nationally and internationally. His theory of Hong Kong as a "culture of disappearance" warrants the lengthy description I quote below:

In the first place, disappearance here does not imply nonappearance, absence, or lack of presence. It is not even nonrecognition – it is more a question of misrecognition, of recognizing a thing as something else... There is something very definite about disappearance, a kind of pathology of presence... [Secondly], if Hong Kong is now a focus of attention because its very existence is under threat, nevertheless, the way the city has been made to appear in many representations in fact works to make it disappear, most perniciously through the use of old binaries like East-West "differences"... disappearance is not [then] a matter of effacement but of replacement and substitution, where the perceived danger is recontained through representations that are familiar and plausible. But there is also a third sense of disappearance that we find in the innovative examples of Hong Kong culture... developing techniques of disappearance that respond to, without being absorbed by, a space of disappearance.... [I]t is a question of working with disappearance and taking it elsewhere, of using disappearance to deal with disappearance. (7-8)

Abbas specifically situates the films of Wong Kar-wai as examples of this third strategy, although his book, written in 1997, appeared before the release of *In the Mood for Love*. Suggesting that contemporary Hong Kong cinema has come to see itself as its own primary subject of attention, Abbas argues that the effect of the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China led many in Hong Kong to "look at the place with new eyes... seeing it in all its complexity and contradiction for the first time, an instance, as Benjamin would have said, of love at last sight" (23). Given this situation, Abbas argues, Hong Kong films are often constructed within traditional and popular genres, and, in their explorations of memory, history, and culture, do not directly reference Hong Kong's ongoing political situation (24). This "love at

last sight” may account, too, for the affect of sentiment and nostalgia, melancholy and mourning, through this rapprochement of the past even as a way to consider the present and the future. This leads to films marked, as Abbas argues, by a sense of “elusiveness, slipperiness, [and the] ambivalences of Hong Kong’s cultural space” (24). These characteristics subtend Abbas’ coining of the phrase “*déjà disparu*,” the already disappeared, which he elaborates as “the feeling that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been...it is as if the speed of the current events is producing a radical desynchronization...” (25-6). Thus, what some may recognize as the nostalgic impulse of *Mood* becomes instead a way to trace disappearance – of a lover, of a people, of a city and its culture. The feeling of desynchronization – between the past, the present, and an unknown future – arises in that these traces are marked, primarily via the film’s aesthetic, by a sense of absence and ambivalence centered on a “cluster of memories of what has never been.”

Although Abbas uses the words “replacement” or “substitution,” the notion of displacement I’ve suggested above draws what is characterized as “the perceived danger” of Hong Kong’s reality and the subsequent “familiar” representations of the city into a more provocative, less causal (and thus less permanent) relationship. It suggests not only the temporary disappearance of the one for the other, but the sedimentation this creates in the image. It also leaves more room for the possibility of re-emergence or an undoing of the displacement. What has narratively disappeared in the film is not only the spouses and the former marital relationships, not only, too, Mrs. Chan and Mr. Chow from each other by the film’s resolution, but a stable conception of time and space as proceeding in a singular and linear, stable and accessible, fashion. Thus, the cinematic strategy of drawing out time I described in the previous section provides a way to conceptualize disappearance via the medium of the film, and thereby to consider disappearance as the salient feature of Hong Kong’s existence. Displacement, as I’ve conceived it, thus becomes an essential “technique of disappearance” that innovatively responds to and engages cultural conditions.

Particularly evident in the intermediary, drawn-out time that feels unique to *In the Mood for Love*, the film uses its style to open a contemplative space to consider not only the characters, but the workings of time itself and Hong Kong's unsteady and fluctuating relationships to time.²⁴ By evoking the future of 2046, the film lays out a continuum – from 1949, through 1997, to 2046 – that is not linear, but compounded and vertically displaced onto the diegetic period within the film, each calling the other into being simultaneously.²⁵ Displacement, then, offers a way to further thematize this culture of disappearance, and thus a way “to use disappearance to deal with disappearance” as Abbas advocates. For nearly everything is displaced in this film, from entire populations to audio and visual referents – one thing is made to stand in for another, one thing is made to move from one place to another. Chow and Chan must step into and out of each other's roles in their rehearsals, as well as displacing themselves into imitations of the other Chow and Chan and replacing themselves back into their own skins, as they anticipate, test the waters, and wait indefinitely. Likewise, the indeterminable future of Hong Kong is displaced onto a reconsideration – similarly hypothetical and provisional – of the past, suggesting, perhaps, diverse strategies of reconstruction, remembrance, or (re)creation in the face of disappearance. The displacement of time – 1997 re-laid onto the early 1960s; the early 1960s laid onto the period between 1997 and 2046 – in turn can stand in for the alternating movements of distancing and collapsing displacement demands.²⁶

But to what extent can such a practice of displacement allow ethical and complex representation? And what relationship do such representations and representational/aesthetic strategies bear to the essay? A first strategy exists in Wong's continued attention to Hong Kong's situation, particularly in the trilogy of films of which *Mood* is a part. In interviews concerning these three films, Wong oscillates between

²⁴ For example, although critics of directors such as Resnais have noted a “suspicion of visuality” inherent in the cinematic text, Wong seems to embrace visuality as the means to probe its possibilities (Wilson, 7).

²⁵ See Abbas' full manuscript for a compelling further discussion of the way in which Wong's films use the medium to question the capacities of representation itself, too lengthy to include here. See also his earlier article “The Erotics of Disappointment” in the edited volume, *Wong Kar-wai*, that discuss Wong's manipulation of speed in terms of both technology (quick cutting, step-print technology, etc.) and aesthetic representation.

²⁶ David Bordwell makes a similar argument in *Planet Hong Kong*, writing that, “Treating time as at once unmanageable flux, a stretch of reverie, an instant revelation, and an undying memory, the films invite critics to search for allegories of impermanence reflecting Hong Kong's pre-1997 anxieties” (273-4).

linking the stories of the trilogy (*Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love*, and *2046*) and maintaining that they must be approached as separate stories. I argue, however, that although each film functions to varying degrees as essayistic, independent films, the trio is best understood as an interactive, multi-directional cluster of meditative essays. In each film, Wong emphasizes similar inquiries, all be they from somewhat different directions. Viewing the trio of films as a constellation of essays not only emphasizes Wong's committed attention to issues such as time/space representation and cultural identity, but also links these compositions in a productive cluster of ongoing intellectual thought.

Wong's second strategy for ethical and complex representation is visible in his frequent oscillation between explicitly calling attention to the political and cultural undertones of the film (such as in his synopsis concerning *2046*, the last clause of which stresses that the year 2046 marks "the date of Hong Kong's final integration into China") and minimizing the connections to Hong Kong's unsettled place in favor of individual characters' struggles and displacements. Such fluctuation in Wong's stated focus suggests the interconnectedness of both the individual experience of loss and a national experience of loss and anxiety in wake of the ongoing – yet indeterminate – relationships between Hong Kong and China. These competing ways of describing and assigning meaning to the films also illustrate Wong's competing desires for his films to function both narratively and metaphorically, locally and globally. Like most successful essayists, Wong seeks to explore both realms – the self and the world, as well as their mutual influence on one another – without reducing either to easily interpretable or singular stratagems.

Instead, viewers are forced to grapple with the range of interpretations the film subtends. In this way, Wong successfully negotiates the dichotomy of inevitable change for Hong Kong that exists even in the "no change for 50 years" philosophy China has offered.²⁷ In not glossing over the impending changes

²⁷ This dialectic is aptly summed up in the "sequel" (what Wong calls an "echo") which follows *Mood*. Although there is not room to fully discuss the film *2046* here, a few key connections are useful. The tagline for *2046* – "Live for the future, long for the past" – most clearly articulates the connection between past and future, as do the film's numerous references to the year 2046, and the film's trailer which focuses on the number through a montage at the end. Throughout both the film and the trailer, the discourse positions the year/place 2046 as "A place where lost memories are remembered...but no one knows since no one has ever returned from 2046...except for me." This claim positions

of Hong Kong, Wong confronts the most pressing anxieties of the nation and, in this way, becomes the “director who has portrayed most meaningfully the pathology of Hong Kong in the pre-97 period” (Teo, 164). Although his cinematic representations range from highly metaphorical to more direct, I contend that *In the Mood for Love* provides the most nuanced and potentially productive expressions of the difficulties of a changing cultural landscape.²⁸ Through his fluid relationship to genre, his simultaneous invocation of both global and local contingencies, and most of all, through his use of the image instead of only the individual as a locus of subjectivity, Wong’s *Mood* offers a compelling example of representing complex subject positions and relations.

These representational strategies demonstrate essayistic ways of writing (and filming) the world. Yet they also illustrate the ways that the essay allows such complex representation and inquiry through its generic and stylistic flexibility. In many ways Wong’s ethical representations depend upon his ability to access a range of cinematic genres – the melodrama, the buddy film, the gangster movie, and classical wuxia (martial chivalry). The combination of these genres within the hybrid essay films supports Wong in offering a broad range of meaningful representations beyond the familiar and reified representations that Abbas argues contribute to the disappearance of Hong Kong and its citizens. Wong doesn’t simply rely on tried and true generic conventions but consistently develops them, problematizes them, and recreates them for new times and new issues. Such a practice of revising significant forms of representation to

the protagonist Chow (who has aged three years since the finale of *In the Mood for Love*) as having privileged knowledge concerning the changes between past, present, and future. Caught between change and stasis, Wong describes *2046* as a film which considers how a person “faces his future with all the things that happened in his past.” Referencing China’s “50 years unchanged” policy with regard to post-97 Hong Kong, Wong poses the question, “But what wouldn’t change in this world?” particularly through the film’s theme of delayed reaction. For more on how *2046* more explicitly displaces Hong Kong’s situation onto the narrative lines of the film, and for Wong’s quotation of Roland Barthes’s observation that “forgetting is like remembering,” see the Sony release of the DVD, particularly “The Making of *2046*” and interviews with Wong and actor Tony Leung (Chow) included as bonus features.

²⁸ Although more critical work needs to be done in response to *2046*, as well as the interactive complexities of the trilogy as a whole, it is my contention that what *Mood* may lack in directness for certain viewers is more than remedied in the complex representation the film offers and in the strategic and suggestive ways the film uses the image to draw attention to Hong Kong’s changing and precarious relationships within itself and in relation to mainland China. *2046*, although more direct, borders at time on a too-literal alliance between women as characters and women as symbols. Although Stephen Teo generally posits this later film as the culmination of Wong’s cinematic prowess, this reaction may in part be due to this literal affiliation: as he points out, on an “allegorical level, the film denotes Hong Kong’s affair with China through Chow’s affairs with Mainland women: Zhang Ziyi, Faye Wong, Gong Li and Dong Jie....Hong Kong, having fallen into a state of changeless time for fifty years, has a long period of delayed reaction time. It will be fifty years before the tears flow” (149).

address new experiences and problems mirrors, according to some, Hong Kong's very nature as a rapidly transforming locale. Teo, for example, situates Wong's work as quintessentially Hong Kong, in that it makes "something new out of a patchwork quilt of Eastern and Western elements and a crossing of many genres. [...] just like Hong Kong itself" (160). This suturing of hybridity into artistic practice allows cinematic representations such as Wong's to rapidly respond to and engage contemporary issues.

Artistic practice and intellectual inquiry grounded in such hybridity thus attends to both local realities and their broader repercussions. Despite Rey Chow's concerns, then, the local and the global become engaged interlocutors, allowing one to give meaning to the other and reaching beyond the local audiences of Hong Kong to present the difficulties of Hong Kong to a global audience in compelling ways. In response, the ways the global community imagines and describes Hong Kong ripple back to influence individuals. In the ways the film asks viewers to recognize both what is specific to this particular moment in Hong Kong (even as these realities are projected into the past) while simultaneously recognizing the way that the film exceeds these local tensions and speaks to larger concerns about nations, identity, and political indeterminacy, *Mood* realizes the rich dialogue that exists between the local and the global.

All of these features of *In the Mood for Love*—its sustained (if oblique) attention to the city's development, its effectively hybrid nature, and its linking of the local and the global—contribute to the film's most suggestive means of ethical representation mentioned above: its writing on the image, not necessarily the individual. The innovative ways that Wong visually problematizes the spaces and times that Hong Kong has, does, and will occupy creates a fluid range of subject positions for individuals to inhabit. In ways both similar to and different from Marker's *Sans Soleil*, *Mood* juxtaposes changing personal relationships with changing political situations, particularly through the use of archival footage that disrupts the surface of a highly aesthetic, seemingly insular love story.²⁹ From the reoccurring waltz borrowed from an earlier Japanese film, to the disruption of the carefully controlled aesthetic by

²⁹ See Peter Brunette for more on the connection between the 1966 riots in Hong Kong arising out of the cultural revolution, Charles de Gaulle's landing in Cambodia, and the ways that Wong wanted to focus on this time as "the end of something and the beginning of something else" (98-100).

documentary footage, the film thus constructs a hybrid, contemplative space – an intellectual and aesthetic arena – as an oblique attempt at considering the city of Hong Kong, itself. The stylized aesthetic the film establishes thus becomes a way to make visible the absence of a tangible, knowable future.

Whether via problematizing time and perception through slowed down, contemplative images, or whether bridging personal and national identities through a practice of artistic displacement, *In the Mood for Love* expands the ways we imagine acting, being, and creating relationships in a rapidly changing global world. Most importantly, Wong does not delineate static subject positions in the face of change but instead allows the image, itself, to bear the weight of these pressures. Such an aesthetic strategy frees the individual subject to be more than one way, have more than one reaction, and inhabit a range of possibilities in response to the surrounding world. Through sumptuous repetition that gestures to the future by way of a recollected past, one of Wong Kar-wai's best received films achieves much more than nostalgia for a beautiful, past time. Complex, nuanced, and aesthetically hybrid, *In the Mood for Love* expands the ways we consider composing ourselves as citizens in both locally and globally changing landscapes.

5.5 ON THE VISUAL: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON COMPOSITION AND THE ESSAY FILM

As the captions of *In the Mood for Love* suggest, the “era that has passed” is already déjà disparu, while at the same time still remaining visible to some, despite being “blurry and indistinct.”³⁰ Perhaps Wong Kar-wai provides a “cluster of memories of what has never been” as the intersection between a nostalgic and preservative impulse and as an inquiry into an emergent and contemporary Hong Kong, an intersection between an unknown past and an unknowable future.³¹ Or perhaps one marks the disappearance of the

³⁰ Second caption reads: That era has passed. Nothing that belonged to it exists any more.

Third caption reads: He remembers those vanished years. As though looking through a dusty window pane, the past is something he could see, but not touch. And everything he sees is blurred and indistinct.

³¹ Teo makes a similar claim regarding *2046*, arguing:

other, constructing it, finally as an impossibility. I have argued that the concept of displacement offers one way to describe the film's style, aesthetic, and cultural import – to test, as Abbas suggests contemporary Hong Kong cinema must do, how “to define itself in relation to what is felt to be possible” in a changing, contemporary medium.³² But displacement also offers a way to understand the way that the text's composition erects multiple levels which reveal the possibility for situated and dialogic understanding between characters as well as between local and global audiences.

Just as Chow and Chan come to collaboratively negotiate the situation in which they find themselves in order to generate meaning, the two essay films I've discussed above reach out to viewers to elicit their collaborative understanding. Each film, in its own way, explores the range of possible ethical communication and representation.³³ The collaboration of each film is present not only in the shared meaning-making activities between Chow and Chan, the letter-writer and recipient of the travelogues – collaboration is also present as a guiding praxis in the construction of these essays. Whether the films deploy epistemologies of juxtaposition or displacement as their primary ways of knowing, each essay film I've explored depends upon the reinforcing praxis of collaboration and a deep spirit of revision to fulfill its project. The support and potential of the hybrid essay is crucial in assisting these practices and the rich representations that result.

Though the decade has an unmistakably nostalgic significance for Wong, his depiction of the period is fundamentally tragic. Hong Kong in the 1960s was surviving on what the late Australian journalist Richard Hughes famously called 'borrowed time', a pre-97 condition that produced a certain syndrome of fear and insecurity causing citizens to drift and wander – time as a trope of restlessness. In the post-97 era, Wong suggests that Hong Kong now survives on a state of changeless time, which still causes citizens to drift and wander. The hidden political message of *2046* lies here: Wong is really telling his Hong Kong audience that they should take the opportunity of changeless time to reflect on themselves and their history – history being rooted in the past which has given Hong Kong its period of changeless time – in order to prepare themselves for the great changes that are to come after 2046. (141-142)

³² Abbas only briefly mentions the idea of displacement in his coda to the manuscript, arguing that in a globalized world there is no longer space to displace one thing onto another. I've argued however, that displacement largely functions in the imaginary spaces of remembered pasts and projected futures.

³³ For another particularly remarkable example of the hybridity of communication, see Wong's *2046*, in which characters speak different languages – Mandarin, Japanese, Cantonese – and yet consistently understand one another. This utopian (perhaps) version of communication presents different ideological difficulties too lengthy to be explored here.

In choosing the hybrid essay as the intellectual arena for their work, I have argued that these two filmmakers compose hybrid, essayistic texts as a way of pushing the limits of understanding. I have also argued that such advanced compositions utilize an essayistic impetus in order to achieve their projects of ethically representing others, finding access points for engaging extremely difficult subjects, and cultivating style and a reflexive component that aids these essay films in questioning their very being and the representations they offer.

Collaboration is paramount for these filmmakers, shaping Marker's early career and style and bringing cinematographer Chris Doyle to the assistance of Wong Kar-wai and his displacement of Hong Kong's cultural reality onto saturated and rich images. Each film achieves a high level of composition – whether through complex oscillation and juxtaposition or suggestive displacement – and through each of these epistemologies each film also develops its own style of presentation. As I've demonstrated, both films excel in their essayism. Highly reflexive, self-aware, hybrid, and open to exploring several overlapping intellectual threads or problems, these essay films allow for skepticism and multiple interpretations through the excesses of the image. It is my contention that focusing on the potentials for both inquiry and understanding these films offer in dialogue with how each film successfully makes use of style to further its project can allow us to expand the ways we think and talk about composition in the writing classroom. Since film offers its own language for talking about style and composition, careful consideration of the similarities and differences with our own composition practices and teaching can potentially contribute a different quality to our praxis, putting pressure on the assumptions and givens within our field.

In discussing style in the essay films above, for example, I have attended to and described a range of qualities and interactions that move between single frames, cinematic sequences, and overall effects and patterns in the film as a whole. Similarly, building on the work in composition that attends to style at every level of the essay – in sentences, paragraphs, and relationships between ideas, as well as holistically – strengthens the ability to productively notice and discuss style as a key component in writing. Attention to style can not only help students strengthen their writing, but can help teachers approach student writing

in new ways. For example, shifting attention away from reading for error to reading for stylistic patterns and choices allows teachers to offer students the benefit of the doubt by trying to understand what a student might be attempting stylistically. This approach to stylistic awareness and even experimentation aimed at widening students' stylistic repertoires seeks to make visible and build on the stylistic practices students already possess.

Opening up our consideration of style also allows the teaching of writing to zoom in on multiple dimensions of the composition and their effects. In addition to sentence-level stylistic attention, a partial list of style-oriented observations might include: the way a composition moves, arranges, and organizes itself; the way a composition establishes a presence, tone, or outlook; the way elements of a piece shift (or don't shift) in response to things around it, acting fluid, static, insistent, or resistant, for example; the quality of a composition, including how we might imagine or describe its texture, shape, being, color, size, or complexity; and, the way a piece constructs the relation between its elements and its entirety. Exploring each of these questions of style moves beyond stable categorization, offering instead a manner of thick description grounded in practices of noticing and knowing.

At the intersection of choice/writerly purpose and effect, these conversations about style point us toward a similar place as excesses in the image. The practice of reading, writing, and discussing texts in workshop, however, is not to always and only "correct" these excesses, containing them (and the writing) to predictable and singular interpretations. Although noticing where a piece of writing may have gone astray from a desired effect and working to revise it should be an aspect of the productive work conversations about style allows, there are other worthy benefits. Reveling in the excesses that essays inevitably contain and indeed foster, engaging in the complexities and interpretative richness that style offers, and seeking to open up stylistic possibilities without always trying to align them with predictable (perhaps limited) desires expands the repertoire of available styles for students, sharpening both careful, thoughtful reading practices and facility with finding language to describe writing. In this way, style becomes not only a topic of discussion for advanced writing students, but an epistemology for first-year writing students to deepen their reading and writing practices.

This is difficult stuff, indicative of the difficulties that the essay must bear due to its complexities. I began this project by emphasizing Adorno's description of the essay as a precarious form, its lack of edifying structure sometimes rendering it difficult, illegible, and open to misinterpretation or frustration by some audiences. As I summarized in that first chapter, this risky instability is the price the essay must endure in exchange for its openness and potential. Certainly this can be the case in the essay films I've discussed, particularly on a first viewing. Part of the essay's ability, however, is to counter this precariousness by inviting multiple readings or encounters, provoking additional thought and engagement. As film theorist Nora Alter notes, "It is not uncommon to encounter internal tensions within an essay film because by its very nature such a film is pulled in different directions by its constitutive elements" (20). As difficult as these tensions may be, however, it is these same tensions that make the essay such a rich, exciting, and intellectually challenging type of writing to engage.

As I've shown throughout this chapter, the essay's tensions are multiplied in attempting to combine words and moving images. But these essays also succeed in the way their words and images come together to construct and negotiate meaning, providing abundant answer to Philip Lopate's question:

Will there ever be a way to join word and image together on screen so that they accurately reflect their initial participation in the arrival of a thought, instead of merely seeming mechanically linked, with one predominating over or fetched to illustrate the other? (269)

This question is of course also at the heart of W.J.T. Mitchell's theorization of word, image, and their interrelation and could be applied even more broadly to the interaction of textual examples and analysis within a prose-based essay. Using multiple locales to access a sense of the burgeoning global world, *Sans Soleil* uses a comparative epistemology of juxtaposition to explore ethical representation, the power of the gaze, and the possibility of letting others speak for themselves. *In the Mood for Love* erects a slowed down time to perceive differently; using the past as a lens on the future, the style and nuance of the film enables contemplation of Hong Kong's shifting reality through displacement and letting one

thing contribute insight to another. Word and image refract and crystallize each other; they support and critique one another and they ask viewers to undergo a similar dual effort of both critical scrutiny and generous attempts at understanding.

I hope this chapter has thus made clear how the essay – guided by an essayistic impetus – can exist not only as an alphabetically textual form, but as other intellectual projects embodied in other media. Consequently, this last chapter has offered the essay film as a bridge to confronting the literacy demands and questions raised by media which extend beyond the codex book. There are at least two productive benefits I would like to offer to expand our horizon to the essays that exist in multiple media. The first possible trajectory is to move to the visual in order to move back to writing on the page. The essay film offers a powerful way to expand what we know about the essay and what we believe the essay can do as both an artistic and a genuinely intellectual genre. As I've argued, considering the style of essay films might allow us to revive our attention to style and to thus more fully pay attention to style in the writing we ask our students to do and the role style plays (or does not play) in our own writing. The attention in visual studies to describe and account for style, form, and aesthetic – particularly as these forces crucially assist in making meaning – provides one type of language we might employ, develop, or revise to more fully consider style in writing courses.

A second possible benefit to studying these essay films and other new media essays is evident in the ways in which these essay films deeply engage the difficulties of subjecthood, representation, and critical reflexivity and thus might supplement the critical avenues we have already developed to attend to these issues. As our field becomes more attuned to and concerned with the difficulties of honoring and learning from difference, what lessons can we learn from the different approaches these films take in exploring difference? Have we fully explored how epistemologies grounded in juxtaposition or displacement might allow productive relationships to difference or enhance the range of representations we offer? The essay films I've discussed in depth above situate themselves at the center of these questions which are important to answer not only in terms of individual classrooms but also university-wide practices and positions.

Moving between these levels of classrooms and institutions demands attention to material constraints and to new possibilities. I hope this is work that I've shown in my analysis of these filmmakers, essayists for whom the promise of the intellect is intimately bound to the promise, and material constraints, of their particular medium. Yet these filmmakers are also intimately bound to the essay and its possibility, as Adorno suggests, in constructing "the new as something genuinely new, as something not translatable back into the staleness of already existing forms" (169). This is indeed the work of university education, broadly speaking, and liberal arts education more particularly. Yet for beginning college composition students, working beyond the "staleness of already existing forms" – for many, this might mean the five-paragraph essay – can be both intimidating and liberating. It can be challenging and overwhelming to try out a form which thrives on "curiosity, the pleasure principle of thought," working to call into question, revise, and reconstruct, at least for the moment, the writer's perception of the world (169). But the essay can also be an extremely congenial and forgiving form, giving students the space and impetus to try out ideas and their writing at the next level of intellectual engagement.

As the essay cannot achieve without sacrificing its own security, embracing the essay necessarily means letting go of certain things in order to strengthen other capabilities. In these essay films, this sometimes means eschewing linear narrative or plot, verisimilitude, or a frenetic entertainment-driven pace to which many contemporary film viewers are accustomed. In writing, we recognize that the essay "develops thoughts differently from discursive logic," and in this way confounds or moves beyond rhetorical principles such as logic, subordination, linear development (Adorno, 170). The essay instead uses its ability to construct an assemblage of meanings drawn together through coordination. Adorno seems to suggest that the radically reflexive and changeable nature of the essay may indeed be outside of "rhetoric," although it is not outside placing itself in interaction with other systems of knowledge. Whether the essay constructs a form and logic outside rhetoric entirely, or whether we may imagine it along the lines of Judith Goleman's articulation of emergent rhetorics that compete with traditional rhetorics in dialectical struggle will rely on how we continue to define and redefine rhetoric(s) and their

relation to the field of composition (“An ‘Immensely Simplified Task’: Form in Modern Composition-Rhetoric”).

What is clear is that the composition of essays is critical work that, through the construction of an intellectual arena, can move beyond the limits of rhetorical argument in order to concern itself with other relations in and among texts and viewers. In ways similar to how Ackbar Abbas foregrounds Wong’s preoccupation with shifting the visual and generic terms for representation – arguing convincingly, for example, that Wong’s films do not create a new “form of an argument,” but instead, a “new practice of the image” which works obliquely to address Hong Kong’s most pressing contingencies – new media essays might also shift the terms of productive representation and critical inquiry. This is the powerful potential that essays hold, no matter their form or medium, since an essayistic impetus attempts to create the ability to shift the terms of debate, change the ways of perceiving the world and its texts, or create new approaches to thinking through a problem on (or more and more frequently, off) the page. The work we ask students to do – thoughtful and attentive, critical and reflexive – whether composed in film, in words and images, or solely in prose is most successful when we join students in an intellectual arena that extends thought as well as students’ repertoire of composition strategies. The hybrid essay provides such an intellectual arena – one that both we and our students can learn much from and productively inhabit as we consider the range of compositional choices which confront us daily.

6.0 CODA

This dissertation has considered the essay as an intellectual arena and as an epistemological impetus that can productively guide the work of intellectuals and students within the composition class and, perhaps, within the university more broadly speaking. I have focused particularly on the uses and possibilities of hybrid essays which make readily visible the ways that discourses and genres interact and thus provide especially fertile ground for students to practice negotiating, and putting to purposeful use, a range of composition strategies.

The claims I've advanced above are particularly important if, as Kathleen Blake Yancey argues, the work we ask students to produce both determines "certain constructions and (yet) provides the texts we assess. Put differently, what we ask students to do is who we ask them to be" (739). This project has asked: Do we want students to take advantage of and develop a range of literacies? Do we want students to "be" more than singular, static, and fixed – already pre-determined or easily and familiarly fashioned on demand? ("Palimpsests," 739). For Yancey, answering these questions means valuing the postmodern characteristics of "fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity" (740).¹ In this dissertation, I have emphasized and valued a slightly different set of characteristics that I have grounded in the intellectual tradition of the essay: skepticism, reflexivity, hybridity, multiplicity. And I have argued that these essayistic categories can help us hold on to the intellectual and dialogic encounters we seek to foster in the classroom, even as we extend the essay to new forms and media.

¹ Yancey's particular interest in this article is the way that digital student portfolios can take advantage of the digital medium to highlight these features and to create multiple paths, access points, and ways of interpreting student work.

This does not mean that we will, or should, leave prose-based essay writing behind. Most rhetoricians and compositionists now agree that we do not, as Laura J. Gurak puts it, need “more manuals on how to create a Web site,” but instead a type of critical cyberliteracy that attends to both the power of and the problems with new technologies and their attendant rhetorical landscapes (“Cyberliteracy,” 180). As Kathleen Welch has argued in her book *Electric Rhetoric*, one way to develop such literacies is to acknowledge the ways that literacy is “not only the ability to read and write but an activity of the mind...capable of recognizing and engaging substantive issues along with the ways that minds, sensibilities, and emotions are constructed by and within communities whose members communicate through specific technologies” (67). Welch’s emphasis on literacy as “an activity of the mind” dovetails precisely with my advocacy of the essay, and with the hybrid essay in particular, in that the essay encourages the attention and engagement of ideas in ways that allow critical attention and reflection on the ways ideas and discourses are constructed and relayed. It is through our teaching of the essay, then, that students become best prepared to negotiate a range of ideas and discourses in multiple contexts and across media, joining their voices to those of others along the way.

Focusing on literacy as an activity of the mind, or following an essayistic impetus as I have called it here, challenges us to continue to attend to emerging forms, neither ruling them out of hand nor jumping on the bandwagon out of sheer exuberance at their novelty. In his article “Story and Archive in the Twenty-First Century,” Randy Bass considers striking this balance in an age of what he calls “overrepresentation.” Faced with the sheer multitude and magnitude of textuality that new media makes possible, Bass argues that we must instead pay more attention to the “expressive capabilities” of these texts. By this Bass means that we might consider and integrate “the expressive capacities of new media with the fundamental practices of the discipline at all levels of knowledge production, including pedagogy for novice learners” (665). Bass’ point is an important one in that it eschews the expanding and proliferating “more-ness” that new media offers (more texts, more sites, more ways to do things) in favor of the ways that new media offers us productive ways of refiguring our field, what it is that we know, and how we construct that knowledge. Bass’ ultimate recommendation is centered on the ways that “new

media certainly offer tools and resources to make the apparatus both more visible and more teachable” (668). By attending to the ways that texts build upon each other and the ways that texts work intertextually to create new forms and meanings out of existing forms, Bass makes a similar argument to that which I’ve made concerning hybrid essays: students can begin to recognize “the apparatus” and can thus adapt, create, and revise more readily and purposefully.

This awareness of the apparatus, so to speak, is essential given our contemporary situation. In schools across the nation, the essay is being called on once again and put to broad use in its most evacuated, formulaic, mechanically-scorable terms. In many circles, the five-paragraph bastardization of the essay continues to be heralded as the way to ensure that Johnny can, in fact, write. As theorists of writing, literacy, and pedagogy it is our duty to shift the response to this crisis – perhaps to a different form of the essay, such as the one I’ve described in this dissertation – or, at the very least, to dis-connect these two very different kinds of “essays.” In relationship to both the long tradition of essay writing and the evolving tradition of essay film making, theorist Nora Alter argues:

Theorists of the essay have argued from the onset that the genre manifests itself in moments of crisis – political and representational. The function of the essay is not therapy or healing the wounds produced by the upheavals of the day, but crisis diagnosis enabling and encouraging future social and cultural transformation. (55)

If Alter is correct, the essay film and the various new media essays that are being constructed might point a way forward from this “moment of crisis.” Paradoxically, it might be the essay, itself, as I’ve defined and advocated for it here, that can provide the critical scrutiny necessary to diagnose the crisis manifested by its most impoverished form.

To suggest how composition might assist in encouraging the critical scrutiny that such a diagnosis would necessitate, I’ll conclude with some final thoughts on the pedagogies that might support such transformation. The pedagogies I’ve described throughout this dissertation have sought to marry the theories and practices I value across a range of provocative texts that intellectually interest and push students beyond their comfort zones. As detailed in earlier chapters, students often make use of

“difficulty essays” in which they pursue a question in depth in order to more fully understand. Driven by their own intellectual interests and an essayistic impetus in the context of a dialogical classroom, this work with difficulty enables students to develop a range of epistemologies productive for their own learning.

A pedagogy driven by reflexivity intimately draws on the practices essential to these confrontations with difficulty. Asking students to reflect on how a particular film or text works positions students to consider how their own texts work, as well as to then move to a meta-critical level which prompts reflection on how they learn and develop as students and writers. As an example, I might ask students to think through the following questions in response to a film like *In the Mood for Love*: How does the film make use of essayistic movement or an essayistic style? What is the film’s epistemological method; that is, how does the film seem to go about figuring something out or testing and illustrating ideas? Guiding students toward these types of questions about texts builds a bridge between their reading practices and the writing assignments which ask students to pay more attention to their own stylistic choices and think about how they, too, go about trying to figure something out or test their ideas. In similar fashion, I might ask students to chart and consider changes across a text, asking: Where are we left by the end of the film? What has changed, if anything, in light of the film? And where are you left – what have you noticed – in looking back across a semester’s worth of difficulty papers? Thinking about change across texts, including their own, provides the impetus for students to reflect on their earlier interpretations and earlier versions of texts, prompting reflection about what has changed for them as a result of deeper interpretation, oscillation between ideas, and dialogue with classmates. These types of pedagogical moves encourage students to build a broad foundation of interpretative skills, continuously revising first impressions and initial ideas and learning how to push all texts – including their own – to more sophisticated, fertile, and nuanced levels. Developing such propensities for reflexivity and scrutiny dovetails with a focus on deep, multiple revisions and critical, intellectual exploration and probing.

The other assignments I’ve discussed throughout this project have spanned argumentative, narrative, and reflexive discourses. These assignments have asked students to pay attention to the

collision of discourses and languages, genres, styles, and modes. For me, the key to moving among such assignments is attending to what each assignment supposes and assumes, how each positions the student, the type of work each expects, and how each connects to larger classroom pedagogies. Just as it is sometimes easy to forget that we are always shown only part of the picture in a film– that something always exists just beyond the reach of the frame – our pedagogies should work to remember and make visible all that usually goes unseen or unsaid. If we find it pedagogically valuable to offer epistemological alternatives to our students, it is our responsibility to highlight what each praxis takes as its assumptions, what each values the most, and how each imagines knowledge to take place.

Making our beliefs – and the beliefs of our larger institutional and intellectual communities – visible is essential if we expect our students to do the same. Our ability to get students thinking meaningfully about what they believe and where those beliefs come from is part of the critical work we do broadly as educators and specifically as writing instructors. Theorizing what it means to represent and to understand, to move between word and image, to ask meaningful questions and to listen, generously, to answers, aids out attempts to engage students essayistically – testing their own beliefs, ideas, and language. The work we collaborate to construct within such an intellectual arena can therefore move us closer to what Trinh T. Minh-Ha describes as “an imagination that goes toward the texture of reality,” instead of black and white simplifications. Practicing multiple ways of knowing and representing the world can move us to a place where the resulting knowledge is more – perhaps outside of – the sum of the possible parts. This type of learning is one that resonates not in terms of information gained or recycled, but in strategies for intellectual engagement. Multiplying the lenses through which we may begin to understand the immense complexity of our burgeoning world and the texts that constitute it allows us to broaden and deepen, revise and supplement our own critical and political positions as writers and as learners, in the classroom and the world.

All this is very well and good. And important. But perhaps a little more needs to be said, directly, about the writing classroom. It is my contention that asking students to attend to what cannot be easily reduced, or even easily represented in language, asks them to extend their faculties beyond the

immediately perceivable, familiar, or knowable. In writing this may mean something as (seemingly) simple as rejecting clichés, complicating simplistic conclusions or arguments, or moving beyond the familiar structure of the five-paragraph theme. Attending to difficulty and nuance also necessarily extends to acts of reading and interpretation within the classroom, as well as to the attendant practices of thinking critically through particular inquiries or problems in a sustained fashion. As students become more attuned to these practices, they can begin to attend to additional concerns and complications in their own texts as well, working toward more aware and purposeful composition and a fuller repertoire of stylistic choice.

How can we help students develop this range of reflexive practices, this arsenal of epistemologies? As I've been suggesting via the hybrid essay, we might ask students to think about where specific discourses come from, what creates the demand for these discourses, and how and why they shape conventions as they do. We might ask: What possibilities are there for infiltrating, shifting, or contesting academic discourses? What are the potential benefits and dangers of doing so? And how can we find a place for discourses which may be perceived as less valuable in scholarly spaces – narratives, collaborative discourses, feminist argumentation, and epistemologies grounded in exploration and discovery instead of persuasion, to name just a few? In fact, how do these other discourses and types of writing put productive pressure on the types of writing and texts that can and should be valued in the academy? Allowing students to enter the conversation about the discourses that shape their world – and that they readily notice with a little assistance – offers them one way to gain critical purchase on (their) writing within the university

By making visible how academic discourses are just some among the many ways we can write and negotiate ideas – that academic discourses are not natural, taken-for-granted ways of communicating but are, like every discourse, constructed and conventionally driven – we also make room for other writing projects that expand the repertoires of our students. Yet even though I believe wholeheartedly in teaching and practicing a range of writing, this dissertation has focused on the essay as the most

productive and rich form through which different writing becomes situated, critical, and effective, and can thus serve intellectual – not merely instrumental – purposes.

Moreover, my work has suggested that composing in a range of essayistic forms, particularly hybrid essays, draws on and extends students' multimedia practices. This approach is essential to enacting the interconnected literacy practices hybrid texts demand, literacy practices which, as scholar J.L. Lemke rightly argues in his essay "Metamedia Literacy," "are not advanced skills that should only follow learning the separate media literacies" (77). Especially in the technologically evolving world, purely "separate" media literacies no longer dominate: we have already gone hybrid.

Important and thoughtful work acknowledging these realities is already happening. For example, the Writers House Project and the proposed New Humanities Center both at Rutgers University provide an intellectual and technologically rich space for the composition of such hybrid, visual essays. There continues to be important scholarship – becoming more and more focused – emerging on new media literacy in its many forms. Although more research addressing the questions I've raised in this dissertation is certainly necessary, my intervention has been to further attend to hybrid essays that have perhaps been sped by too quickly in the rush to move to exciting, perhaps trendy, media technology. Through this attention I have suggested a common thread – a common impetus as I have put it – among the many compositions we might ask students to construct.

In sum, I've proposed the teaching of the essay, in particular the teaching of the hybrid essay, as a way to use this impetus to extend a set of values – critical scrutiny, reflexivity, flexibility, and awareness of genre, discourse, and style. Simultaneously, I have advocated a thoughtful and purposeful extension of our teaching to the range of "essays" that now demand our attention. What unites these two arguments is a sense of both continuity and change. These two hallmarks of the essay have been with us a long time, yet it is this very flexibility and reflexivity that can continue to serve our students, and us, well in our new millennium.

As this dissertation has shown, expanding the range of materials that influence our understanding of composition – shifting our attention to other objects, products, and texts –can assist us in gaining

increased purchase and perspective on our practices and methods. As our field and our students continue to shift, asking these questions will be essential to our continued efficacy and responsibility toward our students. What does juxtaposing our current practices against emerging practices tell us? What do we need to keep the same and what do we want to change? How will these decisions affect our practices, pedagogies, and most importantly, our students? Whatever our decisions, our constant reflexivity is demanded by these questions. By modeling unsparing reflection, the essay points us forward – to new words and meaning, new praxis and values, new aspirations for what writing, our teaching, and our educational institutions can achieve. To achieve these new possibilities, however, I argue that we must strive to inhabit a particular place, a frame of mind, an ongoing praxis. We must strive to inhabit – in our interactions with students, in our discussions and assignments, in our conversations across students' drafts, and in our own writing at every level – that arena of intellectual possibility we've been shown by the essay.

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